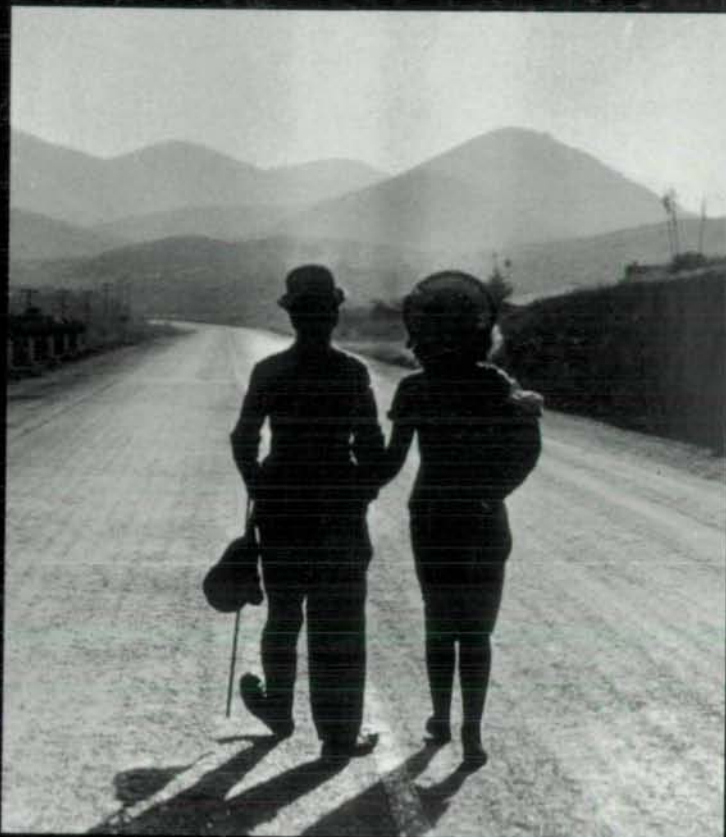


Screen

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the future of Screen Studies

new technologies

new media

new criticisms

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issue editor

Annette Kuhn

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Modern Times (Charles Chaplin, 1936). Picture courtesy: BFI Stills.

Screen Studies Conference

30 June - 2 July 2000

University of Glasgow

The 10th *Screen Studies* Conference coincides with the 10th anniversary of the first Glasgow-based issue of *Screen*, marked by the publication of this millennial issue.

The Conference will offer a mix of keynote addresses, panels and workshop sessions on the past and the future of all audiovisual media and the changing relationships between them.

Papers on a wide range of other screen studies topics will also be presented.

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Millennial editorial

Screen's first issue of a new century also marks ten years of the journal's life in Glasgow. Introducing the first Glasgow-based issue (vol. 31, no. 1), we drew attention to *Screen*'s 'uncanny knack' of changing direction with the turn of each decade since the journal's creation in the 1960s, and stated our intention to reshape *Screen* once again for the 1990s. Our promises then were to encourage empirical and historical scholarship in film and television; to publish research work, especially by students and scholars new to the discipline; to trace developments in the field by publishing regular book reviews for the first time; and to keep a sharp eye on policy issues concerning cinema and broadcasting in a new 'reports and debates' section.

The 1990s did indeed see a number of changes in the journal, some in line with our intentions, others which could not have been predicted ten years ago. While these changes might be less spectacular and, on the face of it, less controversial than some of the transformations of *Screen*'s earlier years, they do perhaps reflect a certain coming of age of Screen Studies – in terms of pedagogy as well as of scholarship.

Over the last ten years, student numbers on Screen Studies courses in UK universities have increased exponentially, alongside a growth in undergraduate and graduate courses in related areas such as Communication Studies and Cultural Studies. At the same time, certainly in Film Studies, a core introductory curriculum appears to have emerged which adopts key aspects of the 1970s Film Studies agenda (the staples of genre, authorship and stars having been augmented lately by attention to issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity). At the level of research and scholarship, on the other hand, Film Studies seems to have maintained its sensitivity to shifts in intellectual fashions: articles submitted to *Screen*, as well as general trends in publications and conferences in the field, suggest

that film theory *per se* has declined in importance in favour of more empirical work, especially in cinema history, and to a lesser degree of new forms of attention to screen technologies.

Meanwhile, the rise of cognate disciplines – and Cultural Studies in particular – has posed a challenge to the disciplinary boundaries of Screen Studies and forced *Screen* to address the distinctiveness of its identity and intellectual project. In 1990 we were fully aware of our responsibility towards television as well as cinema, and equally sensitive to the conceptual, methodological and practical challenges attaching to that responsibility, as well as to the fuzziness of the boundary between Screen Studies and Cultural Studies where television is concerned. The expansion of Cultural Studies as a university subject and an area for research and scholarship throughout the English-speaking world has led us to rethink the discipline of Screen Studies and to question the distinctiveness of its objects and methods of study. While espousing no rigid views on interdisciplinary boundaries, we continue to identify *Screen* as a journal with a particular niche and a distinctive remit. The proof of the journal's continuing distinctiveness, we contend, lies not in manifestos but in its record.

The 1990s witnessed shifts, both local and global, in wider political and technological landscapes, shifts which have impacted in various ways on both screen media and screen education. Two issues in particular stand out in relation to *Screen*, as a British journal with an international constituency and a mission to promote Screen Studies both within Britain and worldwide. Firstly, against the background of an increasingly discredited Thatcherite Conservatism and then the election of the first Labour government for eighteen years, the 1990s saw far-reaching changes in the institutional organization – and indeed in the entire culture – of British higher education; changes which have had paradoxical consequences for our discipline, and for the editorial processes as much as for the content of *Screen* itself. Secondly, the same political forces (driven by a particular ideological response to the effects of digital technology) had equally significant consequences for media institutions – in terms of privatization and deregulation, increasing emphasis on consumer choice rather than public service, fragmentation of production and markets, casualization of labour across the media industries, and so forth. These changes have had contradictory consequences for those sectors of media production formerly enthusiastically endorsed by *Screen*, namely the 'independents' and the avant garde. So, for example, casualized media industries – which are problematic in a number of ways – offer considerably greater opportunities for previously excluded groups such as ethnic minorities and women – something we would obviously welcome.

In short, *Screen* in the year 2000 is being published in academic

and media worlds very different from those of ten years ago. We have inevitably experienced these changes from a British perspective. If, for example, it is straightforward to record that in May 1997, after eighteen years of Conservative government, the Labour Party won a landslide victory in the British General Election, it is probably difficult for anyone outside Britain to appreciate the psychological effect of this on the liberal intelligentsia. Even three years later (and despite the inevitable disappointments and disillusion), there is still a sense that the tectonic plates of British political culture have shifted. *Screen* is based institutionally in Scotland. Scotland now has control – through a Scottish Parliament – of its own education and film policy; the Westminster Parliament continues to exercise authority over broadcasting and telecommunications. The effect of this kind of devolution is to politicize cultural issues in new ways (which we are well placed to observe), opening new kinds of conflict between the local and the national, new frameworks of public accountability and democratic responsibility. But this is not a simple matter either of local politics. It is difficult to disentangle the effects of the breakup of former national entities – not only in Britain but also in other parts of Europe, effects not least on the politicized independent media production sector – from the consequences of global developments in media technologies.

One consequence for film and television has been a confusion of cultural and economic policy (a confusion which becomes obvious when one tries to find out what responsibility which Commissioner has for screen matters in the European Union). One of the first acts of the new Labour Government in Britain was to rename the Department of National Heritage the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. This was not just symbolically significant (the British political establishment had always resisted the idea of a Ministry of Culture as a continental European invention, smacking of *dirigisme* and propaganda) but also had practical consequences. In his rush to show what a Minister of Culture could do, Chris Smith, the first and current incumbent, set up a plethora of task forces, advisory groups and working parties to look at the ‘creative industries’, at British cinema, British television, British music. The British film industry in particular has been the object of systematic policy investigation.

The Government’s concern for a healthy British film (and television) culture has not, however, extended to any interest in academic film (or television) studies. Its key advisors have been practitioners (Smith’s chief consultant on film policy David Puttnam was given a seat in the House of Lords; Alan Parker was appointed chair of first the British Film Institute and now the new overarching English film body, the Film Council); academic policy input comes from economists and management consultants rather than from film scholars. The policy starting point is how to sustain and nurture a national film and television industry described in economic rather

than in cultural terms by reference to exports, inward investment, employment and intellectual property rights.

Education has been a significant part of the resulting debate, but education as defined by industrial needs. On the one hand, the problem is to ensure that British film and television producers have available a talent pool and the necessary array of skilled craftspeople. Education here means training. On the other hand, Smith's Film Policy Review Group suggested that one reason why British films rarely receive proper distribution is that 'the British film audience is less adventurous than some of its counterparts abroad and that it should be a longer-term goal to create a more "cineliterate" population through education, in its widest sense, at all ages and levels'. To this end the BFI was invited to convene a working group to explore how this might be achieved. The resulting report, *Making Movies Matter*, recommends the systematic development of 'moving image education' at primary and secondary school level, and explores what this would mean in terms of curricular development and teacher training. Moving Image Studies as a university subject is not mentioned; the call for more research turns out to be a call for educational research, research into how 'cineliteracy' is best learned and taught.

The paradox for *Screen*, in short, is that the development for the first time of a systematic policy for British film and for moving image education means the marginalization of academic Screen Studies. Having succeeded over the last twenty-five years in persuading British university authorities of the academic value of teaching and researching film, our future as scholars and teachers, it now seems, will depend on our ability to persuade vocationally-minded students and film and television industry 'users' that what we do is valuable in non-academic terms too.

We have described the situation in Britain; but this is, in fact, the local response to a more general set of developments in moving image culture. The digital revolution, in particular, has transformed the conditions of the production and consumption of the moving image globally; and in trying to create a British film and television industry organized around brand recognition and international market share (rather than in terms of public service), New Labour is addressing problems of cultural industry and national identity that face film and telecommunications policymakers everywhere.

This, then, is the context for considering the role of *Screen*, as a determinedly academic journal, in the new millennium; and this is an appropriate moment to take stock of the politics of – and behind – our discipline, to take a fresh look at Screen Studies and its antecedents outside as well as within the academy. Accordingly, this anniversary issue of *Screen* is more than usually policy-oriented, more cross-media, more concerned with contemporary and, indeed, future screen media and screen studies agendas, and, at least on the

face of it, more Britain-centred – indeed more questioning of what ‘Britain’ might mean. At the turn of the century, many assumptions have been thrown open to scrutiny, beginning with the very objects and methodologies of Screen Studies itself. What do we need to know about what? Can we, for example, continue to think of Screen Studies as being just about ‘cinema and broadcasting’? How important are moving image *technologies* in shaping the discipline? Indeed, what do we mean today by ‘moving image technologies’? We must also attend to the contexts in which Screen Studies operates, in which it is produced and consumed as both scholarship and pedagogy. What, in the third millennium, will Screen Studies be *for*? How should screen scholarship relate to state film and education policies? What will be the basis of academic authority in moving image culture? How can what happens in the academy, in the pages of *Screen*, contribute to a public understanding of moving image culture?

For this first *Screen* issue of the new millennium, all members of the journal’s Editorial Advisory Board were asked to contribute short essays on the future of Screen Studies, and were invited to be as extrapolative and as speculative as they wished. Their very diverse responses to this invitation form an extended debates section: eight EAB members, representing four continents, look at topics ranging from the ambient screen to the digital Unconscious. Two distinctive, but often intertwined, themes emerge from this diversity. Firstly, *technology* – and in particular the consequences for media production, consumption, criticism and theory of new technologies for delivery and display of screen-mediated ‘texts’; and, secondly, *global vs local* – and especially the relationship between global, national and regional media and the different types of identity they propose. Under the first theme, Alison Butler urges a revival of women’s ‘films’ in the era of new screen media; William Boddy considers the shift in notions of collectivity implicit in the personal video recorder’s capacity to offer the television viewer customized choices; Barbara Creed explores the metapsychology of digital simulation in mainstream film production; Sean Cubitt looks at how digital media might, in their own aesthetic right, redraw the disciplinary boundaries of Screen Studies; Myra Macdonald discusses the implications of moving image digitization for the development of historical consciousness among future generations of Screen Studies students; and Will Straw looks at the plethora of screens, large and small, made possible by new media technology, and considers the implications for the discrete media text. On the global/local theme, Dimitris Eleftheriotis suggests that a Europe constituted at once by a kind of shared identity and a multiplicity of identities might produce new and complex forms of cinema; Ravi Vasudevan, in similar vein, considers the future of cultural and linguistic diversity within, and spoken through, an overarching Indian national cinema; and

Catherine Grant ponders the possibility of reviving the idea of authorship in the study of world cinemas and in the context of a globalized film culture made possible by Internet fandom.

The variety of these arguments perhaps suggests that it no longer makes sense, as perhaps it once did, to talk of a *Screen* project. And if by that is meant the promotion of a particular theoretical line or approach to film analysis then we most decidedly do not have a project (on this topic, see EAB member Alan Durant's incisive essay on the problems of interpretive orthodoxies). What we do continue to assert, though, is that the academic study of film and television is important – and not just for academics. At the very least there must be a voice in the public debate about the moving image which rejects the equation of box-office returns and cultural value. This voice is unlikely to come from the new model BFI (see the interview with Colin MacCabe in this issue) and now competes in the classroom with notions of on-the-job professionalism and craft standards (see Nils Lindahl Elliot's essay). It increasingly competes, too, with a commercially constructed 'media buffery'. One effect of the general availability of films and old television programmes for domestic consumption – on video, on dedicated satellite and cable and digital services, via the Internet – has been to make 'expertise' an aspect of the sales process, as the consumer is provided with an increasing range of guides to film choice and discourses of television 'appreciation'.

This is where the notion of a critical engagement with the screen becomes important, a historically grounded and theoretically coherent engagement. The analytical rigour for which *Screen* has always stood is more important than ever. And if issues of 'alternative' or 'radical' or 'minority' television or cinema have quite different contexts now than in the 1970s, the problems with which *Screen* was then concerned – problems of access and audience and experiment – are even more pressing when the push in the audiovisual industries is towards individual market choice and away from notions of shared experiences or common culture.

What *Screen* stands for, of course, is the common culture of international scholarship. And in Film Studies (though perhaps less in Television Studies – see Simon Frith's report) that culture has always been taken to include non-scholars too. In the different phases of its history *Screen* has been concerned to address film fans, media teachers and students, film and television programme makers, and video artists; to relate the study of screen texts and cultures to political arguments about class, gender, colonialism, ethnicity, sexuality, art. The challenge in the new century will be to retain that sense of relevance (and audience) amidst the ever louder clamour of moving image politicians, technicians, functionaries and sales teams.

What future for interpretive work in Film and Media Studies?

ALAN DURANT

Probably most people can think of at least one book which seemed, at the time of its publication, to highlight fundamental issues of its field and to signal evidently major implications for the future, but which was then not taken up with anything like the interest one might have expected. For me, David Bordwell's *Making Meaning* is such a book. Published in 1989,¹ it developed four key arguments in an extensively illustrated and always eloquent, if sometimes rather theory-weary, way.

Firstly, it drew attention to the pervasiveness of 'a significant American industry'² of textual interpretation in Film Studies ('reading' films, or groups of films), even in theory-led rather than case study or corpus-based approaches.

Secondly, it suggested that common characteristics of the practice of reading – what Bordwell calls an 'art' or 'craft', likening interpretation to 'quilting or furniture-making'³ – dominate over the differing theoretical content of particular approaches, even in apparently highly divergent cases. The craft element, Bordwell suggests, consists of inductive procedures and heuristics (especially the 'representative heuristic': X stands for all X's, or X stands for Y) which map semantic fields onto selected cues in a given film. Such mappings are then deployed in rhetorical arguments (using conventional *topoi*, metaphor, and enthymemes, or pseudo-deductive arguments) to build up a particular thematic explication or symptomatic reading.

Thirdly, within this practice of interpretation, *Making Meaning* emphasizes an inescapable operation of inference, even in such

1 David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). The paperback edition appeared in 1991.

2 *Ibid.*, p. xi.

3 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

seemingly basic interpretive procedures as constructing an apparently concrete, consistent world out of film images. Relatedly, the book drew attention to thematic and procedural schemata (or socially organized networks of cognitive material) on the basis of which such inferences are often drawn.

Fourthly, in its final chapter ('Why not to read a film'), *Making Meaning* criticizes the pre-eminence of interpretive work – what Bordwell repeatedly calls, in a provocative reference to New Criticism in literary study, 'practical criticism' – and encourages alternative directions for study. Specifically, he promotes a kind of 'historical poetics', which would examine the historical conditions of particular forms of film composition and reception, rather than simply ascribing meaning to particular films.

Together, the arguments summarized here amount to a powerful critique of the history and contemporary practice of film interpretation. Interestingly, too, the book's arguments connected closely with changes during the 1980s in debates about meaning in a number of fields relevant to Film and Media Studies, including the philosophy of language and cognitive science. For a variety of both good and bad reasons, during the formative period of institutionalized Film Studies those debates had seemed mostly inaccessible or just plain unattractive.

Given Bordwell's reputation as a scholar – already well-established by the time the book was published – there is little doubt that *Making Meaning* was widely read. It was also reviewed and in some quarters rebuked. But it appears not to have been especially influential. As far as I am aware, there has been little or no serious engagement with the arguments Bordwell presented or with the conceptual frameworks he drew on. All in all, *Making Meaning* remains a book more read than heeded. Ten years on, the extent to which the issues it raised have *not* been pursued inevitably reinforces *Making Meaning's* admonition regarding the future of Film and Media Studies. Trends have become more fixed; and previously prominent critics and theoreticians have retired or moved on to other topics. A new settlement is now visible within the field, one which was perhaps less evident at the time of the book's first publication.

As regards interpretive work, during the period in which *Screen* itself has been published the practices of interpretation Bordwell examined have undergone at least one major reconceptualization: the widely described shift of interpretive paradigm from strongly textual-determinist approaches, making assumptions about effect on viewers, towards more reader-based notions of meaning production, premised on diversity both of possible and of actually occurring readings. Complications surrounding this major change of approach are the focus of my comments below.

Whatever the historical and theoretical limitations of viewing Film Studies of the 1970s and 1980s as a textually-determinist orthodoxy, there was, as has been widely recognized, a tendency for arguments to rely on some version of at least the following cluster of claims.

By means of the organization of their signifying features, film texts create subject positions and prompt a repositioning of the spectator, understood as a non-unitary, 'radically heterogeneous' subject. Such acts of repositioning are achieved, for viewing in particular, by a set of unconscious processes and structures which can be best understood in terms of psychoanalytic concepts (voyeurism and fetishism in work on female spectatorship, for example).⁴ In turn, a close and potentially analyzable relationship exists between spectatorship, understood in this way, and more general processes of ideological interpellation; and because of the link between film viewing, ideology, and subject formation, the practices of cinema production and viewing may be considered political. Classic realism, for instance, stands as the dominant aesthetic of bourgeois cinema and television; but oppositional practices are nevertheless possible, especially in avant-garde cinema. So too are resistant, or otherwise perverse, kinds of reading and pleasure. In general terms, interpretation in this synthesis of semiotics, psychoanalysis and politics involves demonstrating the power of discourse features to construct subject positions, which for want of other vocabulary in this area may be thought of as 'meaning'.⁵

What is so striking about the development of Film and Media Studies over the last quarter of a century, however, is how intense the questioning of such positions has been. With regard to 'meaning' in particular, three main shifts can be identified.

Firstly, critiques of work on spectatorship based on psychoanalytic structures have contrasted theoretical structures of female spectatorship with reported diversity in women's viewing.⁶ In the face of such criticism, relatively abstract structures of spectatorship have tended to be downplayed in favour of examining the differing kinds of significance given to texts by audiences. Over roughly the same period, distinctions made by Stuart Hall and later by others between different types of reading of the same textual material on the basis of ideological positioning (dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings)⁷ forced a corresponding wedge between texts and the subject positions they might be thought to prescribe. Such classification of readings drew attention instead to differences between encoding and decoding. As accounts of such structured, interpretive variation were then extended (in a series of studies offering rich descriptions of the surrounding social discourses inhabited by readers of any given text), an interest developed in audience diversity convergent with that inspired by critiques of

4 Most influentially Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18. For broader discussion see Annette Kuhn, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

5 A summary exposition of this period of theoretical work (nevertheless more nuanced than the account presented here) is Robert Lapsley and Michael Westlake, *Film Theory: an Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

6 Much of this work has appeared, and been discussed, in earlier volumes of *Screen*: the relevant literature is now extensive. For a review and range of positions, with bibliography, see, E. Deidre Pribam (ed.), *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television* (London: Verso, 1988).

7 Much discussion has followed; the original paper is Stuart Hall, 'Encoding and decoding in the television discourse' (Birmingham CCCS: *Occasional Papers*, no. 7, 1973), reprinted in Stuart Hall et al. (eds), *Culture, Media, Language* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp. 128–38. Later variants on the triad 'dominant', 'negotiated', and 'oppositional' codes – each with slightly different theoretical shadings – include 'preferred' and 'resistant' as regards positioning, as well as 'readings' and 'readers' as opposed to 'codes'.

spectatorship. A third major agent of change has been the simultaneous, more general, intellectual shift towards postmodernism, presenting a fundamental challenge to the earlier, semiological ambitions of Film Studies. The theoretical possibility or likelihood of diversity of interpretation has been encouraged by work along such lines, especially on the strength of concepts suggesting indeterminacy of meaning such as polysemy, slippage of the signifier, dispersion and deferral of meaning, and heteroglossia. One incidental effect of investigations employing such concepts has been to confer oblique authority on empirical descriptions of interpretive diversity.

These mutually reinforcing elements of a broad intellectual shift offered opportunities for new kinds of interpretive writing. The implication of homogeneity of effect in textual-determinist accounts of meaning, for example, appeared to deny the experience of culturally marginalized interpretive communities, and could now be empirically discredited; and while the earlier theoretical formation urged political critiques of ideology within a broader, Marxist framework, more recent reception-based studies appear more consistent with a dispersed (often implicitly Foucauldian) field of subcultural identities, agendas and resistance.

The resulting mix of interpretive approaches has coincided, however, with a downgrading of the question of interpretation in the list of investigative priorities. For many, the important arguments have moved on, from mechanisms for producing meaning (interpretation as a kind of 'work') into social issues of identity construction to which particular critical interpretations of texts can make a contribution. Against this trend, I want to suggest that displacing attention from mechanisms of meaning production (from understanding interpretation as a practice) onto what I will suggest are rather the determinants and rhetorical possibilities of interpretation (onto interpretations taken more as outcomes or products of that practice) comes at what may prove a disastrously high price unless alternative directions are now explored.

To the extent that they are considered in Film and Media Studies, theoretical issues about how interpretations are generated are now usually formulated not so much in terms of meaning and interpretation as in terms of audience. This refocusing – a consequence of the theoretical revisionism which nurtured the so-called New Audience Studies of the 1980s⁸ – can seem so natural, even inevitable, that it is easy to miss implications of the different terminology and conceptualization.

There is little question that the New Audience Studies encouraged a sense of active reading: of readers making meaning. In doing so, such studies offered a useful counterpoint to earlier, textually-deterministic studies. They also sought to offer an account of

8 The name 'New Audience Studies' was acknowledged by both proponents and critics. For a collection of his own work, charting development from the *Nationwide* audience to a more open-ended ethnography influenced substantially by Clifford Geertz, see David Morley, *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1992). For a fairly comprehensive range of papers by researchers up to 1990 (which now seems the end of the main phase of the field's development), see James Hay, Lawrence Grossberg and Ellen Wartella (eds), *The Audience and its Landscape* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

communication which recast both the model of subject positioning and also the canonical speech situation as typically described in linguistics, in order better to reflect collaborative or corporate production, as well as one-to-many discourse delivery systems and what have been called 'distanciated' reception contexts.

Surprisingly, nevertheless, little explicit consideration was given in such studies to the mechanisms of sense-making. Equally surprisingly, this omission seems to have attracted less criticism than other possible weaknesses: failure, for instance, to draw relevant distinctions between historical study of empirical audiences and selective presentation of contemporary readings, or to give due regard to media power and the formation of hegemonic readings as opposed to resistant ones. Occasionally problems surrounding meaning were acknowledged; but the terms in which such issues were discussed offered little prospect of specifying linkages between text, reader and cultural context in any given act of interpretation.⁹

For critical work of the 1970s and 1980s, Michel Pêcheux's reworking of the Althusserian conception of interpellation (drawing on Frege and notions of preconstruction to develop a key concept of 'transverse-discourse') had presented one model of how social assumptions might resurface in discourse.¹⁰ In more recent reception-based debates, by contrast, reference is more likely to be made to notions such as variable 'access to social codes'. 'Social codes' themselves are abstract meaning-relations within a social semiotic system: talking merely about 'access' to such codes unfortunately says next to nothing about the psychological mechanisms of selection, retrieval, matching or manipulation of such codes which are preconditions of any act of interpretation taking place.

Faced with this obstacle, one tendency among cultural critics has been to fall back on describing differences between the *bearers* of bodies of cultural assumptions: that is, describing determinants rather than mechanisms of interpretation. The range of social and situational variables involved in audience demographics has accordingly been extended from race, class and gender into ever thicker descriptions of social and situational variables. Audience studies has, in effect, turned away from reception understood as interpretation towards reception understood as demographic description and lifestyle. For all the evident interest of the new work this redirection makes possible, a vacuum is left as regards understanding meaning.

A different way of making my last point would be to say that audience studies has largely abandoned considerations of meaning in favour of considerations of textual use. To which a common riposte is: if there is no such thing as stable textual meaning (either intended

9 See comments in early chapters of Morley, *Television Audiences*. A highly perspicuous and prescient discussion, which nevertheless struggles slightly to find an appropriate vocabulary for meaning, is John Corner, 'Meaning, genre, and context: the problematics of "public knowledge" in the New Audience Studies', in James Curran and M. Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), pp. 267–84.

10 See Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*, trans. Harbans Nagpal (London: Macmillan, 1982). See especially ch. 9, 'The subject-form of discourse', pp. 110–29. A recent reworking and development of many of Pêcheux's arguments is Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

- 11 The phrase 'hermeneutic process of appropriation' occurs in John Thompson's discussion of the globalization of communication in *The Media and Modernity: a Social Theory of the Media* (Oxford: Polity, 1995), p. 171. Confusion between meaning and use is sometimes encouraged by invocations of Wittgenstein's 'the meaning of a word is its use in the language', or 'what do words signify, if not the kind of use they have' (both from *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), respectively paragraph 43 and paragraph 10). Such quotations sometimes lend doubtful authority to the view that meaning is readily redefined by users, with no stable core. One influential attempt to disentangle issues of meaning and use is Umberto Eco's essay, 'Intentional lecturing: the state of the art', in *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 44–63.

or formally determined), then can it matter much whether you call use meaning or meaning use? Or whether you bring both together under the rubric of textual 'effect' or some more evocative but still inclusive phrase such as 'hermeneutic process of appropriation'?¹¹ Are such terms not simply alternative names for properly contextualized interpretation? This is the issue which now needs to be considered.

One problem with not distinguishing meaning, use and effect is that a whole range of different sorts of textual effect are flattened into a single catch-all. Besides 'represent' and 'signify', various other verbs are also widely used in media criticism to signal that meaning is being conveyed: 'communicate', 'express', 'evoke', 'impute', 'ascribe', and so on. Many terms in such a list have both an everyday and also one or more technical senses: 'imply', 'infer', 'entail', 'presuppose', 'denote' and 'connote' are obvious cases. Such words are not synonyms or near-synonyms, nor are they mere stylistic alternatives: they signify different claims as to agency within a complex division of communicative labour. They also signal effects which can differ importantly, for instance as regards susceptibility to contradiction or cancellability, strength of intuition and so likelihood of variation among culturally different audience groupings, and degree of responsibility fairly attributable to text-producer and text-interpreter respectively.

Boundaries accordingly need to be drawn both within the domain of meaning itself and between what we consider meaning effects and other kinds of textual effect which are not usefully thought of as meaning (including visceral fear or shock, involuntary twitching with excitement, catharsis, laughter, fatigue, escapism or long-term trauma). Using inevitably simplistic spatial imagery, we might for instance want a 'lower' or 'inner' boundary, between the complex object 'the material discourse itself' and perceptual, cognitive and affective consequences it prompts. Such a boundary serves to separate meaning from text, and also offers a reference marker against which the varying degrees to which descendent representations of any given text can be judged as regards resemblance to that text's apparent sense. An 'upper' or 'outer' boundary might be drawn where textual interpretation merges into more general reaction, response, preexisting opinion, attitudes, beliefs or triggered memories – effects with less traceable links to the particular textual stimulus and greater likelihood of being prompted equivalently by other, different, texts or experiences.

Even inside the class of textual effects we decide are 'meaning', the question arises whether all discourse processing forms part of what we want to call interpretation, or only those aspects which go beyond an underpinning level of comprehension (the latter involving at least image perception, voice recognition, sentence parsing of dialogue, and so on). Clearly not everything which might be

accurately or usefully said about one set of processes applies to the others; and few people would want to claim that Film and Media Studies is the most appropriate discipline to investigate *all* of these kinds of effect.

Further distinctions need to be drawn regarding how far any meaning presented is assumed to restate or reconstruct some property of the text itself ('meanings embedded in'; 'the text shows') and how far that meaning is thought of as something attributed or ascribed to it ('the audience will see this as ...', 'your imputation is that ...'). It is hardly surprising, given my comments above about the paradigm shift from textual determinism into audience studies, that reception-led work is less interested in the production of meanings by discourse than in the search by audiences for 'meaningfulness'. In this context, 'meaningfulness' may be understood as kinds of significance which bring maximum relevance to the concerns of the interpreter, independently of links back to specific textual features or to an intention of (or effect anticipated by) a text-producer. Such meanings can, of course, be derived not only from texts but from much else in our environment, and depend on the general capability of human cognition to interpret as a world of signs a world where most potential stimuli are nevertheless not there for the specific purpose of being interpreted by us. Problematically at the same time, though, for audience ethnography to sustain a claim to interest in text interpretation – rather than in belief systems of groups of people irrespective of their exposure to particular texts – some continuing claim to meaning as a property of (or as something caused by) the discourse itself is essential.

The uncertainty about interpretation which results – between audiences making texts mean and audiences making texts meaningful – reflects a corresponding uncertainty within much ethnography. In that field, it is not always easy to separate what might be called descriptive aims (for example giving a voice to informants, as a corrective to accounts of them produced by others) from interpretive aims (such as selectively eliciting data on which to model some particular aspect of an informant's beliefs or cultural competence). Back in audience ethnography itself, the uncertainty cuts into research method as well as aim: reporting responses to texts gathered by means of elicitation and autobiographical narrative may be highly appropriate to descriptive aims characteristic of reception studies viewed as cultural demography (and such work may still serve theoretical purposes, including importantly contesting earlier, speculative rather than empirical claims about what a given audience might think). But interpretive aims are likely to require a more systematic research approach.

To explain how meanings are produced by readers as they interpret discourse, it is necessary to investigate the mechanisms of interpretation itself, in greater detail than is possible by reporting

12 For a critical review of, and significant contribution to, one major tradition of discourse research along experimental lines, see Walter Kintsch, *Comprehension: a Paradigm for Cognition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

13 The most persuasive version of such arguments is to be found in writings by Stanley Fish since the 1980s, starting roughly with *Is There A Text in this Class? the Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980). The notion of 'algorithms' for interpretation, and of a 'moral algebra' which might follow from them, can be found in a number of Fish's essays collected as *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech – And It's A Good Thing Too* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

14 See Dan Sperber, *Explaining Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996). The theoretical account of interpretation implicit in Sperber's 'epidemiology', as in his earlier critiques of ethnography and anthropology, is Relevance Theory. See Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

response in a holistic way: to investigate how, in a time-based process which is also subject to species-level processing constraints, the mental store of code-meaning pairings and cultural assumptions represented by any individual reader is combined with a meaning potential specified by the form (or codes) of the discourse to produce a reading. In order to investigate a complex process of that kind, research must give attention to how meanings are generated by text segments of varying lengths and by techniques at many different levels, not just to the claimed significance of whole works. Experimental protocols (such as those developed in discourse comprehension research in psychology),¹² and perhaps a number of other methods, are likely to be needed alongside existing research procedures.

In the next section I move on to consider more practical issues regarding the future of interpretive work. Before doing so, however, I should respond to at least one line of criticism of the sort of arguments I have presented: that such arguments offer simply a return to formalism, fuelled by a fantasy of algorithmic solutions to social questions of meaning, and disavowing two key insights of reception studies: firstly, how far meanings depend on the specific contexts in which they arise; and secondly, how far they are shared across populations, not just dreamed up by individuals.¹³

For all their rhetorical appeal, neither of these criticisms seems to me justified. The 'return to formalism' criticism underrepresents the difference between formalism's emphasis on decoding features of a text and the far more socially and historically anchored processes I am outlining: of inference operating on a combination of textual representations and culturally specific, contextual assumptions. And the 'populations not individuals' criticism undervalues the way in which different interpretive communities diverge as social groups exactly to the extent that they employ different interpretive strategies and/or draw on different cultural assumptions (that is, presumably, what makes them distinct from other kinds of social community). One implication of this point is that, to trace a social circulation of meanings, we should study exactly those processes: that is, we should look at the cumulative effect of local, individual cognitive events linked together in causal chains of repetition and modification across a given society, rather than jumping straight to a macro-scale interface between text and collective public mind. Some interpretations in the vast chain of individual mental representations – which are linked together by social practices involving specific media of text transmission – will resemble one another closely (and will appear therefore to belong to an identifiable interpretive community); others will not. This general approach has been usefully characterized as an 'epidemiology of representations', and deserves fuller discussion in Film and Media Studies than it has received so far.¹⁴

But what about the future of text interpretation in practical terms? After all, I began by echoing an understated polemic from a book already ten years old. What reforms of practice or new directions for investigation do I wish to encourage?

One task, I believe, is to expose a degree of what might be called present interpretive complacency. Investigations into how interpretation takes place are needed which pick up threads from earlier interdisciplinary studies of signification, but without the hubris of a period in which the self-image of Media Studies was that of a vanguard discipline. Without losing sight of the power of poststructuralist and deconstructionist arguments either, it seems imperative – if those positions are to be sustained – to argue them more directly in relation to other (widely unread) intellectual traditions of thinking about meaning, where necessary demonstrating, rather than taking simply for granted or on community authority, how and why fields such as modern linguistics, psychology and large sections of philosophy are so intellectually or politically compromised as not even to merit discussion.

A second task, in my view, is to sharpen features of established rhetorics for presenting interpretations, moderating idioms which encourage obscurity about or slippage in the claims being made. That cliché of Media Studies, for instance, ‘Text X can be read as Y’ needs particular attention. After all, if texts are polysemous in some way which makes serious study of meaning production unimportant, then surely it goes without saying that Text X can be read as Y? Besides, where readings are offered following this formula, at least three fairly distinct possibilities of the modal ‘can’, involving three different claims (and requirements for evidence), are being brought together. One is the relativistic assertion that it is possible for Text X to be read as Y, alongside as many other readings of Text X as you care to propose; the second is that reading Text X as Y is in some way permissible, valid, or legitimate in ways that other meanings are not, with that reading sanctioned or warranted by some set of criteria which then need to be specified; the third is that our understanding of some issue (which needs to be specified) is now improved because, while previously reading Text X as Y had been unlikely or impossible on account of some contextual or theoretical impediment (which needs to be specified), it has now become possible to read Text X as Y.

If this attention to the instance of ‘can’ seems mere semantics – and introspective displacement from the public and engaged role of Media Studies – then I believe we must reassess the implications, for a field concerned with the importance, value (and also potential misappropriation) of textual representations, of not considering mechanisms at work in constructing ‘meaning’ to be a central concern. Issues about how texts create meaning seem after all to apply *especially* in the case of a medium surrounded by arguments

15 Such issues can be traced throughout media effects, gratifications and use debates, as well as in relevant areas of media law. One recent argument concerning the contribution of interpretation to the public reception and effect of texts is Lecerle, *Interpretation as Pragmatics*, see especially ch. 5. So far, Lecerle suggests, media effects studies have overstated the case for direct causation, while audience ethnographies have their notions of textual causation far too weak.

16 The notion of 'exemplary readings' is incidentally illustrated and discussed by Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, pp. 24–5 and p. 83ff.

as to textual effect, including sex and violence debates, allegations of blasphemy and defamation, and other vexed regulatory and standards issues.¹⁵

This reference to public responsibilities involved in interpretation also raises further issues about presenting or publishing interpretations. Clearly human beings are involved in construing aspects of their environment all day long, including a wide range of publicly-circulating texts. What makes 'interpretation' more interesting than such everyday activity is the greater reach and implications of interpretation by comparison with such routine processing. Reflecting on and talking about interpretation almost certainly plays an important role, as a result, in socialization and formal education. But unless specific claims about the benefits of presenting a reading as research are advanced, it seems unclear why anyone should propose that reading (and equally unclear why anyone else should publish or read it). Public, especially academic, readings are part of a social, generally institutional, activity: if they are to be 'interventions', then this will be because they are readings advanced for a purpose.

The main sorts of purpose which are possible – beyond local, professional needs and demands – can be seen in exemplary fashion by considering what are often called 'exemplary readings'.¹⁶ What gives such readings their critical influence and authority is an exceptional combination: a quality of unique, or at least distinctive, new insight which is at the same time grasped as somehow common property, revealing features of the discourse or interpretive context as they can be recognized by us all. To a significant extent, the sorts of 'intervention' such readings make possible – in themselves and by example – depend exactly on problematic aspects of interpretation discussed above, as can be seen if we disentangle senses of the word 'exemplary' and note the process/product ambiguity inherent in 'reading'. Beyond the sense of 'exemplary' as just 'exceptionally good' lies the sense closer to 'example' and 'exemplar': that of a paradigm case, template or model. Both senses combine with the different senses of 'reading'. On one construction, what is to be taken up as our template are procedural features, or the practice of reading, potentially leading in many different directions in new cases. On a different construction, however, it is more the conclusions, or product, of reading which are encouraged, prompting successive replications of routines already targeted on an anticipated outcome.

If this second construction is the more widely accepted – if emphasis is placed on canonical findings rather than on modelling process – then contemporary Film and Media Studies risk simply proliferating repetitive readings. This will be especially the case unless thought is given to the role of a presented or published reading as a social action – not in the abstract, as part of a generally supportable or sympathetic cause, but explicitly in terms of the

pedagogic, informative or polemical effects presenting the reading in a given set of circumstances may have.

Let me emphasize: I am not proposing that studying interpretation rather than producing interpretations is the main task facing Film and Media Studies. Other issues are as likely to be important, perhaps especially questions about new media technologies, media policy and regulation in a period of rapid change and globalization.

The point I want to make is a different one. If accounts of films or television programmes are to be offered as scholarly work in themselves, or are to be presented as the main illustrative material in theoretical arguments, then more serious engagement with the mechanisms of meaning production and meaning attribution are needed than is now common.

Such attention to meaning is essential if Media Studies are to avoid two divergent but complementary excesses: firstly, presenting as textual interpretations empirical descriptions of cultural behaviour which have little to do with the texts they are deemed to be inspired by; and secondly, reading texts so creatively, for maximum relevance to the reader's own concerns, that readings become what Umberto Eco, calling for limits on interpretation, has dismissively called 'psychedelic trips upon a text'.¹⁷ More generally, renewed investigative vigour may be needed if Film and Media Studies are not in future to dissolve back into two broad strands associated with earlier disciplinary affiliations: one strand concerned with investigating money, policy and technology; the other strand – in practice if not in theory – simply a new production line in Liberal Studies.

¹⁷ Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation*, p. 52.

Pedagogic discourse in theory–practice courses in Media Studies

NILS LINDAHL ELLIOT

This essay will analyze the structuring of pedagogic discourse in media theory and practice courses in higher education in the UK. Media theory and practice courses combine the teaching and learning of academic discourses in media, communication, and cultural studies, with media production. The educational field constituted by these courses has been under attack in the British national press for over five years. Although it is tempting to engage in a detailed rebuttal of these attacks, it seems more productive to engage in an analysis that is not determined by the agendas of those writing in the national press. It also seems more productive to avoid the frequently instrumentalist discourses about ways of coping with the advent of ‘mass’ higher education in the UK. Twenty years after the first university theory–practice courses appeared, it is still difficult to find research specifically about teaching and learning media, communication, or cultural studies in higher education, especially – but not only – from the perspective of questions of media theory and practice.¹

Throughout this essay I will use Basil Bernstein’s social semiotic theory to develop a critique of pedagogic practices in the field;² though for reasons of space I cannot provide a detailed description of Bernstein’s general theory. During the 1970s a number of sociologists of education debated aspects of Bernstein’s research; however, it seems that few in Cultural and Media Studies are aware that Bernstein has continued developing a theory of cultural

1 I exclude non-specific primers for teaching in higher education, and I distinguish between the research that has been produced in the field of Media Education – research which has centred either on questions about the reception of the media by young audiences, or on critical recommendations for teaching and learning media studies – and research that examines the ways in which lecturers and students in university appropriate the discourses of media production, and those of Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies in formal educational contexts.

2 See, for example, Basil Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990); and the more accessible *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996).

3 See Nils Lindahl Elliot, 'Media Studies in Higher Education: a Case Study of the Construction and Reception of Pedagogic Discourse' (University of London PhD thesis, 1997).

4 I have also discussed the issues with colleagues teaching in the USA, Australia, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. It would appear that many of the issues which emerge in the British context are also meaningful in other countries.

reproduction which builds on aspects of the work of Durkheim, Douglas, Foucault and Bourdieu, even as he has refined his own categories. The present analysis draws especially on his later theory (found in *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse* and subsequent work), and is based on the results of a case study which I did for my PhD.³ It is also based on numerous discussions with colleagues teaching theory–practice degrees in universities in the UK and elsewhere.⁴ At a time when much of the talk about pedagogy is dominated by discourses of quality control, and by what seems increasingly like the curricularization of higher education, it is my hope that this essay will stimulate alternative, and more contextualized, forms of educational debate and research in the field.

Many, if not all, critics of media theory and practice courses in British newspapers have assumed that the objective of all media theory–practice courses is to prepare professional communicators. However, it is possible to distinguish between on the one hand courses which teach media (or other) theories and practices to prepare students for work in the media production market, and on the other those which teach them to develop what can be described as a *critical disposition* towards the media (or more widely towards popular culture). I shall call the first modality the *vocational*, and the second the *autonomous*. It is important to distinguish between the two modalities from the outset, because it is one thing to criticize a course for not doing what it sets out to do, and quite another to criticize it for failing to do something it does not set out to do. On this account, blanket condemnations of Media Studies based on the assumption that all courses are vocationally orientated are clearly mistaken.

Although the vocational/autonomous divide seems like a fundamental one, it can and must be made more complex. Some vocational courses attempt to educate critical producers – producers able to critique, and to avoid reproducing, such ideologies as sexism, racism, ethnocentrism, nationalism or scientism – whereas others do not address or do not foreground this critical dimension. In the latter courses, lecturers' concern is usually to provide students with the cultural capital necessary to enter the media production markets. I shall refer to the first type as *critical–vocational*, and to the second as *market-oriented*.

Advocates of the market-oriented modality assume that the main objective of higher education is to provide students with the knowledge necessary to compete for employment in one or more of the fields of media production. From this perspective, the fact that higher education takes place away from the workplace – that there is, in Bernstein's terms, a strong social insulation or *classification* of higher education and professional work – is a barrier to be

overcome. The closer the higher education process is to work, the better. This explains why these courses hire professional producers as lecturers, and why their lecturers institute job-placement schemes. It also explains why they organize their teaching and learning on the basis of a variety of forms of what I call *realist theories of instruction*. These are forms of teaching and learning which are structured in ways that attempt to reproduce within the university classroom the conditions found in media production workplaces. An example of this form of practice is when the lecturer acts as executive producer in the university studio, attempting to create as much of the 'atmosphere' of the workplace as possible, and does so partly by teaching in deliberately interventionist ways. To use Bernstein's terms, the educator attempts to exert a strong and relatively visible *framing*, a visible control over the process of learning, and does so in a manner that is meant to emulate what the lecturer believes to be professional relations in the workplace. If classification has to do with the ways in which categories (institutions, fields, subjects, and so on) are more or less insulated from each other, framing has to do with the ways in which learning is controlled in the pedagogic contexts created by these categories and their agents. Classification and framing constitute, in Bernstein's theory, the fundamental dimensions of pedagogic *codes* or *coding orientations*. The code operating in the market-oriented modality attempts to *reduce* the boundaries between education and work, but in doing so tries to exert relatively strong forms of control over learning.

This approach is rooted in an educational history which, to my knowledge, has not been investigated in any detail. It is nonetheless possible to suggest that from a historical perspective, one of the distinctive features of theory–practice courses is that they produce fundamental changes in the classification of education and work. Before theory–practice courses were introduced in higher education, media apprentices learned media production by working with producers in a media organization. There was not a strong insulation, if indeed there was any at all, between the space and time of learning and the space and time of working. Media apprentices learned, and in many cases still learn, by participating directly in the everyday work of media organizations. With the introduction of media theory–practice courses in higher education, the learning of media production begins to take place *away* from work: there is a different time and place for learning media production. Although some courses attempt to reduce this distance by means of work-placement schemes, on one level these strategies actually confirm the new classification of education and work: the student must *leave* the university space to work in a media organization.

This shift has a number of implications for the process of cultural reproduction. Whereas the media apprentice learns by observing and

participating in actual productions, the university student learns by engaging in simulacra of communication. Despite the strategies of even the most 'realist' forms of teaching, these simulacra inevitably entail a number of transformations. It is frequently lamented, for example, that universities are unlikely to have as advanced technologies of media production as do professional media production organizations. But the simulacrum also involves changes in the times and spaces of production, in the ethos of communication and, equally important, in implied and empirical audiences. These changes create a context in which what is learned at university cannot be exactly the same as what would be learned by an apprentice working within a media organization. In a variety of forums on teaching media production, I have heard television, film, radio and print producers criticize this situation: university courses, they say, are not sufficiently realistic: students do not emerge equipped to enter the marketplace as professional producers. However, from the perspective I am developing in this essay, university courses in media production cannot but be 'unrealistic': although it is possible to reproduce aspects of what I shall describe as a regulative discourse or orientation, it is impossible exactly to replicate work conditions in university when the process involves such a different space and time. To be sure, attempting to do so raises a fundamental question: if the market-oriented approach seeks to reproduce the workplace, what distinguishes courses with this orientation from further education, or indeed from inhouse training? Put more bluntly, if the aspiration is to reproduce work conditions within university, why should a student bother with a university degree?

A second critique of market-oriented courses is perhaps more familiar to those who oppose vocationalism on the grounds of the legitimization of differences based on social class. Vocationalism in general entails an ambiguous class politics. Bernstein notes that it may appear to legitimize a working-class interest by way of a curriculum which is at least partly based on manual skills, and in so doing to include working-class students as significant pedagogic subjects. However, these advantages may be more than offset by the tendency of vocational courses to close off educands' personal and occupational possibilities by recreating within the educational field the hierarchy of the economy and indeed of the culture – and thereby its symbolic barriers.⁵

In the context of higher education courses in media theory and practice, this argument can be refuted on the grounds that the spiralling costs of higher education, and especially of media production courses, exclude – or will eventually exclude – working-class, and perhaps even some middle-class, students from the more vocational courses. If anything, such courses may eventually become a space for the reproduction of high class cultures, as many believe

⁵ Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, p. 87.

has been the case within organizations like the BBC. But Bernstein's critique may still apply if we analyze symbolic barriers in a way that includes boundaries of gender, 'race', and ethnicity. For example, in my experience the ethos of market-oriented approaches tends to be particularly effective in producing gender-based forms of discrimination. Many media production instructors or technicians structure learning in ways that emphasize the importance of control over media technologies and techniques. This form of teaching is likely to be particularly exclusive of women. An analysis of student appropriations of one of my own courses in which a technician employed this pedagogical approach revealed the extent to which male students used the acquisition of the technical skills to assume control of video productions.⁶ Unless the teaching actively encouraged female students to overcome gendered roles in relation to video technology, many of them felt it was best to 'leave the toys to the boys'. This usually meant that, even in groups where female students appeared to be in overall control as producers or directors, the 'boys' used the 'toys' to impose their own production agendas. A pedagogic approach which leaves these roles and boundaries unquestioned is more likely to sustain similar relations in the workplace.

I would now like to consider in more detail the pedagogy of what I have described, somewhat misleadingly, as an 'autonomous' orientation. Advocates of this modality, which until the early 1990s was the most common one in courses in cultural and media theory and practice, assume that the fundamental aim of higher education is to foster a critical disposition. Here, too, it is necessary to render the vocational/autonomous dichotomy more complex by recognizing that there are a variety of ways of preparing students to be critical, and that indeed there are a variety of ways of defining the notion of 'being critical'. A functionalist conception of 'being critical' is quite different from a poststructuralist one, for example. But despite differences on this level, it still seems possible to speak of a shared tendency among advocates of this educational modality to assume that such a disposition can only be achieved if the university breaks with the 'tyranny' of the workplace, and with realist pedagogies. In marked contrast with the vocational modality, this approach is influenced by a liberal educational discourse which makes a virtue out of the strong separation of education and work. Although most autonomous courses in Communication and Media Studies do teach at least some media production, this is not designed to provide the educand with the skills necessary to obtain specialized employment in one of the fields of production. On the contrary, teaching is frequently designed to provide the student with what can be described as a utopian space for reflection, experimentation, criticism, and for developing alternative ways of interpreting mass media texts.

Many of the advocates of the autonomous modality assume that its

liberalism makes it less prone to subsumption by the ideological relations promoted in the marketplace. In my experience, however, the difference between the two modalities lies not in the presence/absence of these relations, but in the way in which they are reproduced in each. Here too, Bernstein's more general analysis seems relevant: using Emile Durkheim's anthropological categories of sacred and profane, and referring to what he calls the autonomous visible pedagogy (one with relatively explicit forms of framing), Bernstein suggests that this modality is

both a sacred and a profane form, depending essentially upon one's position as either transmitter or acquirer. From an acquirer's point of view an autonomous visible pedagogy is instrumental to class placement through symbolic means. *Yet it has the cover of the sacred.*⁷

7 Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, p. 86 (emphasis mine).

The autonomous modality works by providing only some of the cultural capital required to enter a particular field of production. This is because the process works in relation to a broader cultural economy that relies as much on the newly acquired cultural capital as it does on the student's existing symbolic capital, especially – but not only – her/his social class placement. Here we can point to the trajectories of generations of BBC television producers who have gone straight into broadcasting from Oxbridge, with degrees in history, politics, economics or zoology. It can be argued that what mattered most in these cases was not how intelligent these producers were, nor how much technical expertise they had – they frequently had no technical knowledge whatsoever – but their accumulated cultural and symbolic capital: the social skills acquired in university, but also the name of their university; and their family's social placement, as made evident in social manners, and 'connections'. In other words, the ability to recognize, to be recognized by, and to participate in, certain social networks. The benefactors of this process have tended to dissimulate the inequalities at the root of this system by way of appeals to the unquestioned excellence of the university, the presumed excellence of its students and, of course, to the modality's sacred quest for autonomy: we want people who can think for themselves, our producers should have a first-class education, and so forth. It is significant that no contradiction is perceived between this position and the one that condemns the 'lesser', 'new' British universities (the British polytechnics that became recognized as universities in 1992) for not providing sufficiently realist programmes.

Bernstein suggests that the arrogance of this modality 'lies in its claim to moral high ground and to the superiority of its culture, its indifference to its own stratification consequences, its conceit in its lack of relation to anything other than itself, and its self-referential abstracted autonomy'.⁸ It is an arrogance which is by no means

8 Ibid., p. 87.

attributable solely to Oxbridge. Many pedagogic practitioners teaching on autonomous degrees within 'new' British universities still subscribe to the principles, if not to the 'tone', of the autonomous ideal of the ancient universities. In so doing, they may reproduce similar forms of social exclusion. From this perspective, it may well be the case that where one educational modality excludes by depriving female, working-class, or ethnic minority students of the cultural capital necessary to overcome social barriers, the other excludes by ensuring that only, or mainly, those who have the prerequisite symbolic capital can use their education to obtain employment. The autonomous modality is, in this sense, anything but autonomous of the social market.

A second and more subtle critique of the autonomous modality involves a different theory of instruction. It would appear that if market-oriented modalities tend to have coding orientations associated with more realist modalities of pedagogic control or framing, autonomous modalities operate on the basis of codes associated with more idealist modalities of framing:⁹ that is, theories of instruction which take advantage of the strong insulation between education and work in order to teach on the basis of a relatively weak form of framing and of a romantic-idealist conception of subjectivity. This form of pedagogic practice is deliberately non-interventionist, and treats the student as a potentially gifted genius who must above all be encouraged to be *creative* in ways which would not be possible in the professional field of production. Here the tendency is not to engage in working analyses of the politics of *making* media texts. It seems that whereas the more realist pedagogies encourage students to accept existing genres unquestioningly, the more idealist ones tend either to do away entirely with the category of genre, or to formalize the breaking of genre rules to the point where they fail to prepare students to intervene in media production contexts driven by fiercely policed genre boundaries. For these and other reasons, this form of instruction may well be the other side of the same ideological coin: whilst realist theories of instruction reproduce social relations by promoting them relatively explicitly, idealist theories of instruction reproduce them by ignoring them. One of the many challenges facing media education lies in developing modes of teaching and learning which escape this lethal oscillation between a realist, and an idealist pedagogy.

I have so far refrained from critiquing the critical-vocational variant of courses in Media Studies. The reason for this is that a critique of this modality requires a somewhat more complex form of theorization. It is a truism that in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies there is no single 'dominant paradigm' that

9 This is only a tendency: this binary can be rendered more complex by recognizing that in many courses, there is a mixture of realist and idealist theories of instruction at work.

determines the nature of research carried out in the field. Although it can be argued that there is something like a shared 'anti-paradigm' – with most researchers agreeing to reject any paradigmatic affiliation with one or another approach – the fact remains that the terms 'Media Studies', 'Communication Studies', and indeed the more general 'Cultural Studies', are more productively conceived as ways of naming a multidisciplinary field or fields of research. For this reason, it is not possible to locate all educator–researchers and the courses they teach on the basis of any single matrix of criteria. In addition to a striking variety of objects of study, it is possible to locate lecturers and courses in relation to disciplinary or multidisciplinary orientation; according to the aspect of the process of communication on which they focus; the genre(s) chosen for analysis; or indeed, the extent to which the analysis gives a central role to categories of everyday life as opposed to categories of media production or construction. Many courses may have an 'official' orientation within one or more of these categories, but are likely to have lecturers who classify themselves quite differently, and who may even oppose the official orientation.

This constitutes an additional source of complexity that needs to be mapped on to the classification of theory–practice courses. It has generally been true that in the UK, most theory–practice courses have been closer to Media Studies than to Cultural Studies, if so neat a distinction can be made. But comparisons based on precise module offerings can nonetheless reveal substantial differences even between courses which share a similar orientation to work. For example, two critical–vocational courses might offer a very different curricular mix, with one emphasizing the sociology of media institutions, say, and another the social semiotics of media texts. Or two critical–vocational courses which share an emphasis on the sociology of media institutions might nevertheless teach production techniques in different genres: one might specialize in broadcast news genres, for example, while the other might concentrate on interactive multimedia.

These are important differences which have provided both the cultural capital and the official identities of courses in the field. Although yearly course listings exist, to my knowledge no detailed, systematic survey has been published which maps these differences from contemporary, let alone from historical, perspectives. I would nevertheless like to develop an analysis of similarity and difference based on a somewhat different, if related, criterion: the ways in which the courses *combine* 'theory' and 'practice' discourses. This is the framing process that Bernstein calls *pedagogic discourse* in his later theory. This concept is related to Foucault's notion of discourse¹⁰ insofar as discourse is understood as systematically organized ways of representing aspects of the world which reflect the meanings and values promoted by codes or social institutions.

10 See, for example, Michel Foucault, 'The discourse on language', in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1993), pp. 215–38.

11 Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, p. 183.

However, Bernstein specifies this theory in order to describe the logic which determines how two or more course subjects or discourses are combined. This is a fundamental aspect of any teaching activity: teaching involves deciding whom is to be taught what, where the 'what' depends in part on how different course subjects are integrated and differentiated. Bernstein argues that the *form* of integration and differentiation carries messages about social identity, relation, and order. For example, a course that attempts explicitly to integrate 'theory' and 'practice' modules is quite different from a course which offers the 'same' subjects, but makes no effort to integrate them. The logic of combination of course subjects is not innocent, is not without social effects: it has effects on those who take the courses, but also, and less obviously, on the nature of the taught discourses themselves. Pedagogic discourse can thus be thought of as an invisible discourse, a silent 'device' that articulates certain tacit assumptions for a given *combination* of discourses. Key to this process is what Bernstein describes as the *recontextualization* of two analytically distinct discourses: an *instructional* discourse, or a discourse of specialized skills or competences, is embedded in a *regulative* discourse, that is, a discourse which establishes a specialized order, relation, and identity.¹¹ Pedagogic discourse is the logic that articulates these two, and is central to pedagogic practice.

This is an aspect of teaching which, in my experience, has received comparatively little critical attention in theory–practice courses. I will analyze how the various modalities of theory–practice courses, especially the critical–vocational modality, produce and reproduce certain assumptions about social relation, identity and order when their educational practitioners recontextualize 'media theory' with 'media practice'. From the outset, I would like to propose the following hypothesis: in different ways and to varying degrees, all theory–practice courses tend to be based on a pedagogic discourse whose *official* logic is to integrate elements of 'theory' with elements of 'practice', but whose *actual* logic tends to *oppose* these two subjects or discourses, and to reproduce the social contradictions which insulate them and their agents from one another.

This is especially true for the critical–vocational courses. These tend to treat Media, Communication or Cultural Studies as the 'theory' which is meant to 'guide' media production, where media production is regarded as 'practice'. To treat theory and practice in this manner entails a double transformation. First, Media, Communication and Cultural Studies are themselves practices: theoretical practices, perhaps, but practices nonetheless. In this sense it is misleading to treat them as a disembodied theory, or even as theory which is meant to guide media practice (or media production). Most research in Cultural and Media Studies is not produced in order to guide media production practices, at least not in the

instrumental way that, for example, a Focal Press media production primer does. To be sure, there is not one theoretical practice but a number of different theoretical practices concerning a wide variety of subjects, many of which have little or nothing to do with the production, construction or reception of specific media texts. This may seem obvious when stated, but it is not necessarily obvious to someone reading a course description which says 'media theory and practice'.

Media production discourses undergo an analogous recontextualization. The different forms of media production are not themselves theory-less or thoughtless forms of practice. Although the various practices of media production tend to be based on relatively unselfconscious, or *craft*,¹² forms of reasoning, they nevertheless embody discursive orders which are constitutive of professional identity, relation, and order. Being a television cameraperson entails far more than just handling the camera: it entails adherence to a politics of representation which is bound up, at least in mainstream production, with a corporate sense of place and identity, and almost always with a specific genre politics. Depending on the genre and the organization in which one works, one does some things as a cameraperson and not others.

These two discursive transformations – theory as practice-less theory, practice as theory-less practice – are the result of an empiricist reduction that has a long history in western culture, one that suggests that theory is to do with the mind and practice with the hands. This dichotomy is never valid, but is especially invalid in the case of media production, where Fordism has never been able entirely to colonize the production process. The dichotomy is also typical of what Fay calls 'policy science': a 'theory' that is a discursive regime is 'applied' to a practice in a way that disregards the culturally embedded nature of the practice-to-be-transformed.¹³ To speak in this way – in terms of a 'media theory' that 'guides' a 'media practice' – is tantamount to promoting a false principle of subordination, a false principle of recontextualization – which is one of the hallmarks of policy science, and of positivist forms of applied science in general. Far from promoting integration, course description phrases like 'media theory and practice' actually conceal discursive ellipses or silences which treat media production as so many 'skills' – that is, as an instructional discourse – that can be embedded in the discourses of Media Studies, which are themselves silently articulated as if they were the regulative discourses.

These discursive ellipses or 'out of fields' contain the kernel of the dis-integration of media 'theory' and 'practice' which haunts so many courses. They explain why producers invited to participate in critical-vocational courses frequently teach in ways that flatly contradict the 'official' pedagogic discourse. Producers never simply teach 'skills': unless they themselves have reflected on mainstream

12 The concept of 'craft' must be used with care: it is clear that media production has always entailed a dialectic which involved both 'craft' (in the traditional sense of the term) and Fordist/post-Fordist modes of production.

13 Brian Fay, *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1977).

practice and transformed their own orientation, they teach on the basis of the regulative orientation of their workspace.

It might be assumed that courses with autonomous orientations elude this dynamic by excluding vocational interests altogether. In my experience, lecturers teaching according to this modality do tend to recognize the pitfalls of an empiricist and positivist logic of recontextualization, do recognize that Media Studies cannot simply be 'applied' in media production. Instead, they employ Media and Cultural Studies to help students reinterpret aspects of the production, construction and/or reception of mass media texts, or of social processes related to them. To return to Durkheim, if the sacred for the vocational orientations is media production, the sacred for this orientation is the process of interpretation and reinterpretation.

Even so, this form may have its own problems. In a number of courses which I have either designed, observed or participated in, this 'hermeneutic' pedagogic discourse at times seems little different from a secularized form of religious education: where biblical hermeneutics once provided rules for the legitimate interpretation of sacred texts, the recontextualization of one of the many variants of Cultural or Media Studies in this modality frequently seems tacitly designed to provide students with rules for the legitimate interpretation of profane texts and their even more profane appropriations by audiences. The profane becomes, as it were, the sacred.

In other cases, this logic is developed into something akin to a practical hermeneutics to the extent that lecturers use media production courses as a way of helping students to understand Media, Communication, or Cultural Studies. In effect, media production is recontextualized in a manner which transforms it into a teaching aid. In this case, there is no vocational interest, but there is arguably an inverted form of positivist applicationism.

In the courses I have analyzed or discussed with colleagues in the UK, this modality may also be dogged by the discursive ellipses mentioned above; not on the level of official course descriptions, but on that of actual teaching practice. The ellipses occur as a result of the division of labour, space and time that prevails in many universities. For example, it may be that an autonomous course offers a single module which teaches both Media Studies and media production, and this in a manner which is deliberately meant to contest a strong insulation between 'theory' and 'practice' modules. However, this course may nevertheless be subdivided into lectures, seminars, and studio workshops, with separate spaces, times and staffing for each. This is what happened in a course I taught until 1996: as module leader and lecturer in Media Studies I was responsible for the overall course but conducted only taught lectures and seminars in classrooms, while a technician conducted the 'skills teaching' on different days in the university studio. This division of

space, time and labour – which is itself frequently structured by a salary-scale and class divide, with lecturers belonging to middle and high classes and technicians to working classes – itself constitutes a classification, a cultural punctuation which is especially effective when students come to the course with empiricist imaginaries: there is one person, place and time for things to do with the mind, and another person, place and time for things to do with the hands. Here the dominant pedagogic discourse, which frequently works to separate off ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ discourses into entirely different courses or modules, now works like the proverbial hydra to reinsulate the discourses *within* a single curricular unit.

If my hypothesis is valid, then we can say that the educational practices of the different modalities of ‘theory–practice’ courses reproduce what Bernstein describes as a *collection code*: an educational/organizational form which is based on a strong separation of subjects, and of staff that teach the different subjects. What seems to make this code more complex in theory–practice courses is that it operates despite the fact that public statements about the nature of courses tend to suggest the opposite: that there operates what Bernstein calls an *integration code*: one with an explicit, rational and coherent subordinating principle, with horizontal staff communication and integration.¹⁴

By way of conclusion, I would like to look at a dimension of the pedagogic process which is fundamental to pedagogic communication, but which has thus far not been explicitly considered: the dimension of learning, or of students’ appropriations of pedagogic discourse.

According to Bernstein, pedagogic communication entails both an imaginary relation and an empirical relation. The first is the result of a discursive projection: pedagogic discourse projects an imaginary subject, in the sense of a social ‘person’. It not only classifies knowledge but also promotes a certain relation to the represented knowledge: it frames knowledge in a particular way, and in so doing promotes certain discursive subjectivities in relation to the knowledge, and in relation to the different agents who communicate the knowledge. To use a concept central to what is in effect Bernstein’s theory of ideology, pedagogic discourse reproduces a certain *symbolic ruler of consciousness*: a particular way of creating, positioning and oppositioning pedagogic subjects.¹⁵

I have argued that, despite important differences on some levels, the pedagogic discourses of both the vocational and the autonomous modalities of theory–practice courses tend to promote a symbolic ruler of consciousness which maintains the very oppositions which theory–practice courses are meant to overcome. Media Studies and media production are recontextualized in ways which actually make

¹⁴ Further complexity occurs due to the fact that although a course may be structured primarily along the lines of a vocational pedagogic discourse, there may be at least some lecturers who teach ‘as if’ the course were structured along the lines of an ‘autonomous’ or ‘hermeneutic’ logic of recontextualization, or vice versa. It is vital to recognize this element of complexity because it explains how and why any given course’s dominant pedagogic discourse may be partly or wholly subverted ‘from within’.

¹⁵ Bernstein, *The Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse*, p. 187.

it difficult, if not impossible, for students to develop professional identities based on a new, more critical, disposition. Although important differences in professional subjectivities may result from differences in the exact matrix of instructional and regulative discourses being recontextualized, I would like to propose the following generalization: theory–practice courses are structured by pedagogic discourses which project a 'split' pedagogic subject, that is, a pedagogic subject which is unable to integrate the two or more forms of social relation, identity, and order which are associated respectively with 'theory' and with 'practice'. Unless a course mediates the relationship differently, the kind of reflexivity and self-reflexivity associated with 'theory' discourses is incompatible with the relatively unselfconscious reproduction of *techné* associated with 'craft' forms of media production.

But how do *empirical* subjects appropriate this ambiguity? To my knowledge, very little research has been conducted which explores in detail student appropriations of theory–practice courses in higher education. I can thus only refer to small-scale research which I carried out in the context of a relatively specialized course in science communication on which I taught from 1993 to 1996.¹⁶ The overall undergraduate degree which I researched was structured along the lines of the 'autonomous' modality: its object was to teach students to achieve a critical understanding of science, and science communication. However, I investigated students' responses in relation to a course unit which was closer to a 'critical–vocational' orientation. This was the video theory–practice module referred to above. This module was designed to teach students to produce reflexive and self-reflexive video documentaries about science and nature. Although 'theory' and 'practice' were meant to be integrated in a single module, the division of labour, space and time which I have described structured the entire teaching and learning process. And although I had taught all the different aspects in other universities, here I taught media analysis in lectures and seminars while media production technicians (or instructors, as they were called) taught media production in workshops. Despite efforts on my part to use seminars as spaces for integration of the different discourses, teaching and learning was entirely structured by a collection code.

A year-long analysis of the construction and reception of pedagogic discourse in this module suggested that most students learned along the lines of a vocational orientation. Students who adopted this learning mode resolved the dilemmas and contradictions of the critical–vocational pedagogic discourse by embracing unselfconscious 'craft' forms of media production – that is, the regulative orientation of the technician and of the dominant forms of science communication, the very forms we were supposed to critique. Faced with the disintegrating dynamic of the collection code, the

17 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

students opted, usually unselfconsciously, to reproduce the subjectivity associated with the dominant regulative orientation. This did not mean that they simply acquired it without transforming it, however: my research brought to light what, with de Certeau,¹⁷ can be described as the many *tactical* ways in which students inscribed their own times in the space of both the media production and the vocational discourse of their instructors.

Although the majority of students appropriated the discourse in this way, several learned in ways that suggested a different modality, one that was less clearcut, but no less problematic from the perspective of the aims of the course. Students reproducing this second modality were able to recognize the critical project of the course, and indeed in some cases even came to value it in a positive manner. However, they were unable to produce videos which communicated in ways consistent with this orientation. Instead, they produced videos which seemed relatively 'incoherent'. A closer analysis revealed signs of struggle: a struggle to articulate contradictory discourses, ambivalent pedagogical stances, or ambiguous relations between 'theory' and 'practice': in short, a struggle to articulate a new principle of coherence when faced with the split subject projected by the module's pedagogic discourse.

Although this struggle may be valued *as* struggle, I now regard it as a sign of disempowerment. The precise nature of the disempowerment can be explained with Bernstein's categories of reception. Bernstein argues that if a process of cultural reproduction is to occur, social agents must mediate not just the selection and formulation of knowledge, but also its acquisition. Here two social rules play a fundamental role: appropriation of the *recognition* rule enables the educand to recognize the nature of a particular context, and to recognize when communication is or is not appropriate to that context. The social distribution of this rule is a function of power: not everyone possesses the recognition rules for a given context, and this constitutes a fundamental way of including or excluding an individual (and indeed a social group) from communication in a given context. Appropriation of the *realization* rule determines whether or not the educand is able to put together a message for a given context, and make it public. A student may appropriate the recognition rule, but not the realization rule: she/he may recognize what counts as legitimate text or production for a given context (and thus recognize when others produce 'mistaken' forms of communication), but may not be able to produce such a text her/himself.¹⁸ I take it that this opposition must be treated not as a simple dichotomy, but as one which describes the two poles of a continuum of forms of appropriation: no appropriation whatsoever, acquisition of the recognition rule, acquisition of the realization rule.

The minority of students who learned according to the second modality (which valued a critical orientation) began to acquire rules

18 Bernstein, *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity*, pp. 31–2.

of recognition, *but not the rules of realization*, for new forms of science communication. Some students incorporated aspects of the critical orientation in their video productions, but did so in a way which was incoherent – both from the perspective of the critical discourse itself and from that of the goals that had been set in relation to a particular audience. Generically, the video productions of these students were closer to an audiovisual ‘essay’. They could communicate only by reverting to the generic forms they associated with the critical discourse: academic forms of writing – which were in this context inappropriate. Although this was partly because students had relatively little time to become familiar with media production discourses, it was more fundamentally the result of forms of pedagogic discourse which failed to integrate the various instructional and regulative discourses in ways that fostered a critical and coherent orientation to science communication.

If my analysis is valid, then a fundamental challenge, especially – but not only – for practitioners in critical–vocational courses in Media Studies, is to develop approaches which use critiques of existing social relations not as an end in themselves but as the first steps in an educational process which leads to the explicit formulation, teaching and learning of critical *alternatives*. These alternatives must themselves be taught, and will always entail an ineluctably normative aspect: despite the value of critiquing the canons of existing forms of media production, it is impossible to contest dominant forms of media production without proposing, and actively promoting, alternative modalities which may themselves become ‘canonical’. An analogous argument can be made with respect to the critique of pedagogic practice. It is not possible to teach and learn alternative forms of media production without actively promoting new ways of teaching and learning: involving not only new forms of media production based on a very explicit *eidos* or guiding image, but also aspects of the epistemology of the craft model that has traditionally been the object of critique in Media and Cultural Studies. The difficulty of negotiating this paradox may well be one of the reasons why the field is so vulnerable to attacks in the press; to empiricist, but nevertheless valid, questions such as one asked at a conference by a television producer: ‘Yes, but what can your students *do*?’

The black box: the value of television and the future of television research

SIMON FRITH

I begin with a point that is so obvious as to need restating. In the western world television has been the dominant medium of the second half of the twentieth century. It has transformed political communication and the process of democracy. It has changed the ways in which news is gathered and made public. It is a source of new forms of cultural identity. It dominates the household world and has reshaped domesticity. It is at the centre of what is now meant by commercialism, advertising and selling. It shapes both low culture and entertainment and high culture and art. The other mass media – radio, the cinema, recorded music, sport, print – feed off television (which can reach far greater audiences than any of them), and as members of the television public we now taken it for granted that our knowledge of the world – of faraway events, scientific advances, other ways of life – is first mediated by television.

The cultural importance of television has long been recognized, of course. It is the most discussed of twentieth-century media; the medium most debated by politicians, criticized by journalists, attacked by satirists and analyzed by academics. And yet there is no academic discipline of Television Studies to take its place alongside Film Studies, Popular Music Studies or Sports Studies. In Britain, at least, there are no separate departments of Television Studies, no annual academic Television Studies conferences, no Television Studies journals or professors, just as there is no clear practice of

1 This is one reason why Raymond Williams's work, as both academic and critic, remains so remarkable. See *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana Original, 1974) and the collection of his 1968–1972 *Listener* columns, *Raymond Williams on Television: Selected Writings* edited by Alan O'Connor (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

2 This is clear in the British Film Institute's Television Industry Tracking Study, a longitudinal research project which has been monitoring individual careers at all levels of British television since 1994: insider assessments of the changing quality of television clearly reflect the particular job occupied. (Reports on the findings of this Study are available from the BFI.)

television criticism to take its place alongside film criticism or rock criticism.¹ Rather, the medium is studied (and written about) from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives, each of which produces 'television' as a different kind of object. In the British academy Television Studies is primarily conducted in four disciplinary settings: Film Studies, Cultural Studies, Media Studies and Communication Studies (compare, for example, the articles on television in *Screen*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Media, Culture and Society* and *European Journal of Communication*), while some of the more significant television research has come from more old-fashioned disciplines: social psychologists have dominated research on television uses and effects; political scientists have developed the most fruitful theories of television's influence on contemporary political culture.

There are two ways of regarding the scattering of television research across so many academic sites. One could say, first, that this simply reflects the nature of television as a medium; that television is a ragbag concept, with the same term being used to describe different things. Take a simple question: what is good television? This could, in fact, refer to a number of different issues. What is a good television service? (Channel Four? Sky 2?) What is a good television programme? (*Casualty*? *Drop the Dead Donkey*?) What is a good television company? (Pearson? Hat Trick?) What is good television technically? (in terms of sound or picture quality?) Such questions obviously relate to different issues being raised in different circumstances. What should I watch? What should I subscribe to? In which company should I buy shares? Is it time to get a new television set? And the question of 'good television' needs immediate clarification: good for whom? Advertisers or viewers? Large or small companies? Investors or television professionals? Technicians or critics? The interests of these various groups are not necessarily compatible (however much the various players would like to claim they are).² In academic terms, then, different disciplines obviously focus on different television interests: economists on how television programmes make money, Cultural Studies scholars on how programmes make meaning, and so on. The diversity of Television Studies simply reflects the variety of ways in which television matters as a medium. To treat 'television' as the object of a single disciplinary approach would be to misunderstand its social significance (just as to assume that television writers like Gary Bushell, Chris Dunkley and Nancy Banks-Smith are all engaged in the same critical process is to misunderstand the range of television's cultural impact).

But there is another response to this situation, which is to argue that what makes television peculiar – and important – is precisely that it does describe so many different issues. If nothing else, then, the academic task is to examine how these issues relate to each

other, how what we watch (and how we watch and what we make of what we watch) is related to regulation, to production processes, to ownership, to technology, to advertisers, and so on. In public debate, after all – in the debate about the meaning and importance of public service, for example – it has always been assumed that technological, political, economic, managerial, professional and aesthetic issues are intermingled. This is one reason why television is different from other media in its cultural and social effects. Take this pledge from British Culture Minister, Chris Smith, to the Royal Television Society in 1997:

Our objective is to secure good quality and diversity in broadcasting and to ensure acceptable standards of taste and decency, while doing what we can to promote its competitiveness in the global market-place.³

3 Chris Smith, *Creative Britain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 95.

Replace ‘broadcasting’ here by any other medium (‘the music industry’, say) and it would sound decidedly odd. Why should broadcasting markets be treated differently from other markets? Why should governments be involved in this way? The answer clearly lies in a regulatory history that has produced television as a complex cultural form.

There is a sense in which what we are witnessing now is precisely a move to make television an ordinary rather than a peculiar medium, a simple rather than a complex form. The suggestion is that television’s peculiarity was simply technological, rooted in the conditions of spectrum scarcity. This did mean a particular kind of regulation and, in Britain, a particular kind of public service. But in the ‘digital age’ neither is any longer necessary: the digital revolution will automatically produce an institutional revolution. Such a belief in technological determinism is widely held in the industry; by Tony Garnett, for example:

For Huw Wheldon’s generation the possibility of broadcasting attracting the whole nation to a common culture, like a village drinking from the same well, was a sustaining ideal. It was also merely the social manifestation of the technology of the day. Technology predicates social change.⁴

4 Tony Garnett, ‘Notes for the Raymond Williams Memorial Lecture’, *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 3 (1998), pp. 33–4.

5 Smith, *Creative Britain*, p. 101. For a useful discussion of the policy questions posed by such a ‘transitional’ phase see Richard Collins, ‘Public service broadcasting in the internal market’, paper submitted to the *Experts’ Meeting on Public Service Broadcasting in Europe* (Amsterdam, 17–18 February 1997), Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, pp. 35–49.

And there is also an assumption that the market is the default mechanism for media production and consumption; public service the aberration. In the digital age, it seems, television production and consumption will be determined by market forces and the usual mechanisms of individual consumer choice. Even Chris Smith suggests that we are living in ‘a transitional phase, moving from the presumption that television is closely controlled to the presumption that it is one part of a competitive, commercial, multimedia content production and delivery industry’.⁵

But this is to beg two sorts of question. Firstly, it may be true that

if television were to be invented now, it would be organized differently; but this does not mean that we should act as if television *were* being invented now. The funding system we have is obviously the result of specific historical conditions; but it may be both a rather good method of funding broadcasting and, more to the point, may have produced a medium which has values, practices and effects which are worth preserving for cultural and social reasons. Digital technology in itself does not determine the future: a variety of political decisions have to be made about how and why to use the technology, decisions which rest on competing views as to what television should and could be, views which are themselves historically based. This means, secondly, that politicians are involved in broadcasting in ways that they are not in any other medium, and there is certainly a symbiotic relationship in the UK between party democracy and public service broadcasting (which means that changes in one imply changes for the other: devolution is a problem for the BBC just as much as regulation is a problem for politicians).⁶ Politicians ask questions about broadcasting they would not ask about the record industry nor even about the press, and Chris Smith takes it for granted that television is the key to national culture:

In broadcasting, we are dealing with an industry which plays a crucial role in determining individuals' sense of their own identity, moulding their tastes, interests and consumer preferences. It is, quite simply, rather more important than regulating competition in the provision of goods on the supermarket shelves.⁷

But is television regulation so important? Is television as significant for the public as it is for politicians (who rarely watch it)? If, as the director-general of the BBC John Birt predicts, 'broadcasting will one day no longer be a shared cultural experience', does this matter politically?⁸ Is the equation between spectrum scarcity, broadcast monopoly and national cultural identity simply being replaced (as a direct result of technology) by an equation between multiple outlets, consumer choices and cultural fragmentation?

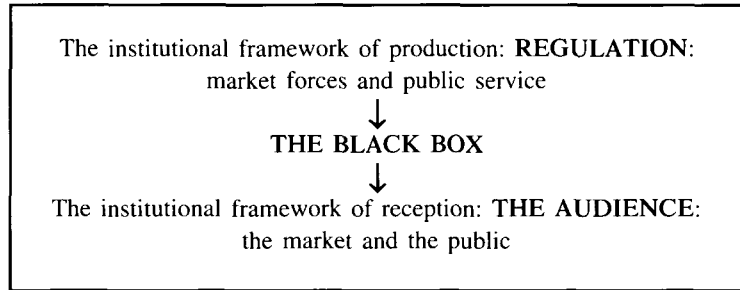
Such questions lay behind the Economic and Social Research Council's Media Economics and Media Culture (MEMC) Research Programme. Between 1995 and 1999, this programme funded a number of research projects aimed at examining the effects of technological and regulatory change on British media institutions and culture. One of the incentives here was an anxiety that the fragmentation of Television Studies into different disciplinary concerns was sedimenting; and the programme was designed to stir the pool, as it were, in at least two respects: firstly, research proposals were encouraged from academic disciplines in which little work had been done on television – law, economics, management science; secondly, Cultural Studies academics were challenged to think how, in research terms, they might give the various different

⁶ For the latter point see Philip Schlesinger, 'Scottish devolution and the media', in J. Seaton (ed.), *Politics and the Media: Prerogatives and Harlots at the Turn of the Millennium* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

⁷ Smith, *Creative Britain*, p. 93.

⁸ John Birt, cited in Chris Barrie, 'Pay TV warning for "all live sport and top shows"', *The Guardian*, 6 November 1998.

strands of television culture some sort of coherence. The former aim, not surprisingly, turned out to be easier to meet than the latter, but the combination of different sorts of research projects on the programme has, I think, helped us map the field constructively (and while 'the field' here means British television I think the arguments are relevant to other national systems, at least to those with their own public service traditions, as in Europe, Canada and Australia). This is best presented in the form of a linear diagram:



I use the term 'black box' here partly as a pun (to stand for the television set itself, and for the various digital devices we are now supposed to attach to it), and partly as the customary term for that element of a process we do not understand, which remains somehow a mystery. What I want to suggest initially, then, is that the *framework* of television production and consumption is reasonably well understood (or, at least, extensively researched). On the one hand, regulation has been fruitfully analyzed in terms of the complex relations between technology, capital, politicians and the law in both national and international settings. Researchers on the MEMC programme such as Andrew Graham, Tony Prosser, Peter Humphreys and their teams have clearly shown that what is at stake in broadcast regulation is not technological determinism but political decisions taken in the context of particular kinds of lobbying activity, with reference to particular national cultural ideologies, and in terms of particular national legal traditions. We do, I think, now have good knowledge of how the regulatory frameworks are established within which television institutions work.⁹

On the other hand, while the MEMC programme itself undertook no work on audiences, they are probably the most researched group in television, whether in terms of market research (including all those BBC 'tribes' and focus groups, and the ITC's annual viewing study), the 'social effects' work supported by the Broadcasting Standards Council (on such things as viewers and violence, or children and the visual media), or the ongoing interest in television reception in the research of the Glasgow Media Group and the British Film Institute. The framework of television reception (if not the broader nature of television culture) does, again, seem to me to be well studied.

9 See, for example, Tony Prosser et al., *Regulating the Changing Media: a Comparative Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); the articles by Peter Humphreys, Alison Harcourt and Thomas Gibbons on broadcasting regulation in Germany, Britain and the EU in *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Law Journal*, vol. 16, nos 2-3 (1998); Andrew Graham and Gavyn Davies, *Broadcasting, Society and Policy in the Multimedia Age* (Luton: John Libbey, 1997).

Which brings me to my 'black box', television in itself. One reason for using this term for the production process – the process in which programmes are commissioned, made, transmitted and viewed – is to complicate its supposed linearity (from idea to viewing) and to suggest that to understand it we have to draw together institutional and textual approaches: studies of television companies cannot be disentangled from studies of television programmes. And so although I could fill the box straightforwardly – **production structures → specific programmes → the television viewing experience** – in doing so I would have to note the complicating factors. At the beginning of this process, for example, are questions of access, recruitment and socialization: who gets involved in television production and how? And equally, at the end of the line we are not simply dealing with commodities – what it means to 'consume' television is a complex question, not easily reduced to economic or market models. 'Television culture' refers as much to viewing practice as to production process, and the question becomes how the two kinds of culture relate to each other.¹⁰ One link is the discourse of value, usually focused on programmes themselves, whose makers anticipate their meaning and importance for viewers just as viewers make assumptions as to how and why these programmes came to be made. Take this extract from an article by Tony Hall, chief executive of BBC News, in which he explains the thinking behind the changes in BBC TV's news programming:

For the BBC there is the deeper responsibility of serving the interests and needs of all its licence payers. We have to offer a menu of programmes and services which match the lifestyles, aspirations and expectations of young and old, people living in northern cities or southern villages, the over- and under-employed alike. And it is only by genuinely understanding the different things people want from news that we can get our mix of programming right and continue to deliver the standards of excellence, to everyone, that have made BBC news so strong.¹¹

If the audience itself is not in my black box, a theory of the audience (and its relationship to the market) certainly is.

I shall come back to this; but the first thing to say about the production process from a research perspective is that it is relatively neglected (compared to regulation and audience). In John Corner's recent survey of the present state of Television Studies, 'production' takes up just ten pages (out of 120).¹² Corner explains this in terms of access: since the development of the VCR, programmes have been readily available for analysis while reception studies have long been an aspect of both market and academic media research. Access to the production process, by contrast, whether through direct observation or in the indirect use of interviews and archives, depends on the cooperation of the producers themselves. For professional,

10 For a rich discussion of viewing culture based on the BFI's five-year diary project see David Gauntlett and Annette Hill, *TV Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 1999).

11 Tony Hall, 'A prime-time balancing act', *The Guardian*, 7 September 1998, Media Section p. 9.

12 John Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

commercial and pragmatic reasons this is not always readily forthcoming.

The MEMC programme focused on television production issues in three projects.¹³ Researchers on these projects investigated a number of questions: how does the current regulatory/market framework for television production affect the value judgements made in the process of producing and delivering programmes? who decides what is 'good television'? how do they decide this? is there a consensus view in a production team? what sort of conflicts do such decisions involve? how do such pragmatic, on-the-ground judgements relate to economic arguments about the value of programmes, to cost negotiations between programme buyers and sellers, between commissioners and producers, between producers and directors? And while we are now better informed about the effects of management structures on programme-making processes, about the various forces that shape television drama as it proceeds from idea to transmission, and about the ways in which independent production companies compete for commissions,¹⁴ this research has also revealed our general ignorance about the sources, meaning and implications of *creativity* in the television industry. Similarly, if decisions are being made all the time and at all levels about what is 'good' and what is 'bad' television, it is not at all clear on what sort of knowledge or judgements such decisions rest, whether they are consistent or coherent at different levels and in different sectors of the industry (independent producers consistently refer to commissioners' 'irrationality') or whether they in any way match or articulate accounts of good and bad television outside the industry. Our research does, at least, suggest that the technological and regulatory changes of the last twenty years (the changes in the historical and institutional contexts of programme making) have disrupted established production mentalities ('the dispositions, values, and working "practical" consciousness of people at the various points within the production process') and production practices ('the particular skills and conventions of audio-visual construction and of performance which combine to make a television programme').¹⁵ I want to discuss these changes by reference to three concepts: *quality television*, *valuable television*, and *good television*.

The problem of the concept of *quality television* (still the most commonly used evaluative term in British television debate) is that it 'tends to be defined with reference to the way it is produced: whether it is well researched, original, has artistic merit, high "production values", aims to challenge the imagination and intelligence and so forth. . . . It is, by and large, broadcasters who debate and conclude issues of "quality" and decide how much it is worth paying to achieve it.'¹⁶ While 'quality' television thus seems to

13 Georgina Born: 'Redefining public service broadcasting: an ethnography of the BBC'; A.D. Cosh et al., 'Structural change, competitive advantage and media regulation'; Patrick Humphreys et al., 'Study of industrial modes of television drama'. Production was also studied as part of the project run by David Buckingham et al., 'Children's media culture: education, entertainment and the public sphere'.

14 See Georgina Born, in *Media, Culture and Society* (forthcoming); Dina Berkeley and Patrick Humphreys, *Producing Television Drama: Visions and Realities* (Routledge, forthcoming); Simon Deakin and Stephen Pratten, 'Quasi-markets, transaction costs and trust', (ESRC Centre for Business Research working paper 101, 1998).

15 I take these terms and definitions from Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p. 71.

16 Christian Koboldt, Sarah Hogg and Bill Robinson, 'The implications of funding for broadcasting output', in Andrew Graham et al. (eds), *Public Purposes in Broadcasting: Funding the BBC* (Luton: University of Luton Press, 1999), p. 60.

17 Hall, 'A prime-time balancing act'.

18 For this argument see, for example, Elisabeth Murdoch, 'Sky scraper', *The Guardian*, 31 March 1999.

19 Quoted in Corner, *Critical Ideas in Television Studies*, p. 107.

20 For a useful summary of the contrast between public service and market-based accounts of 'good' television see Stephen Pratten, 'Needs and wants: the case of broadcasting policy', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 20, no. 3 (1998).

21 For an illuminating (and dismaying) survey of the television views of the great and the good, see the Broadcasting Research Unit's *Quality in Television: Programmes, Programme Makers, Systems*, published in 1989.

describe a sort of programme, then, it actually describes a kind of production process: the term cannot be disentangled from the ideology of public service, as in Tony Hall's reassurance that 'I believe it really is possible to reach a mass audience with quality journalism, quality drama, quality entertainment and it's time we got to grips with the challenge'.¹⁷ Quality programmes, from this perspective, are those programmes which are not produced according to commercial criteria or by reference to advertising income.¹⁸ Quality programmes can thus be contrasted to popular programmes, to programmes whose production is determined by market choice. It is then only a short move to Rupert Murdoch's notorious assertion in his 1989 McTaggart lecture: 'Much of what passes for quality on British television really is no more than a reflection of the values of a narrow elite which controls it and which has always thought its tastes are synonymous with quality'.¹⁹

There is no need to rehearse the complicated history of the concept of quality here (nor to raise the questions begged by Rupert Murdoch),²⁰ but it is worth stressing that the very idea of quality television is an effect of regulation. 'Quality' is not a term used so resolutely in other countries' television regimes; nor does it feature much in the ways in which other culture industries resolve the competing pressures of art and commerce. Its peculiarity lies in its implication that the mass of television programmes have no cultural value, are produced – deliberately and knowingly produced – to be of poor quality. In ITC terms, the 'quality' programme is the exceptional programme, by definition. This would be an odd assertion in the music or publishing businesses (which distinguish not between high and low quality products but between markets and genres), and marks off the notion of 'quality television' from the management language of quality assessment and quality control with which it is sometimes confused. The idea of quality television comes, rather, from the concatenation of two strands of British regulatory history: high cultural disdain for the mass media; and the defence of public service broadcasting against various forms of commercialization.²¹

The point to stress here is that in becoming implicated in the regulation of British broadcasting, quality became a term deployed across two fronts: as a description of *what* is delivered by television, in terms of programme content and type; and as a description of *how* it is delivered, in terms of broadcasting organization and control. For the ITC, which has somehow to assess licensees' quality achievements and failures, the concept is, then, somewhat confusing, referring at once to programme genre (with a special reference to news, religion and children); to programme diversity; to programme investment (in talent, in production values); to programme source (UK vs the US); and to programme aesthetics (the creative imagination, and so forth). For the academic observer trying to make

sense of this, the additional irony is that a term devised to defend public service broadcasting from commercial logic is built into the way in which British commercial television is itself run. 'Quality television' has become a label, a brand, a way of placing British television product in both the domestic and the global television market. In the *Guardian* Gub Neal, Head of Drama at Channel Four, 'says that audiences of between two and three million for *Psychos* will be regarded as satisfactory, though he's canny enough to admit that what's really important – especially as the series is obviously open-ended enough for recommissioning – is a combination of healthy viewing figures and appreciative critical reaction. He knows that *Psychos* needs to stand out from the crowd.'²² And 'quality' describes a way of standing out.

The confusions of judgement involved here are equally apparent in the BBC's account of its audience. BBC Director of Television Alan Yentob launched the the Corporation's 1999 spring and summer schedule by suggesting that to be popular is good, but not good enough: 'The BBC needs to cross the threshold of people's lives and engage with them on new levels and in new ways ... [the schedule thus] reaches the parts other broadcasters can't reach, catering for people's wants but anticipating their aspirations too.'²³ Peter Salmon, BBC1 Controller, explains similarly why there will be no programme like *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire* on BBC: 'Our priorities are different. We are not, like ITV, about chasing ratings or volume. We produce programmes of ambition and diversity. Neither do we use quick fix solutions. We take a much longer term view of programmes and how they develop.' Which is not to say that Salmon is unconcerned with broadcasting's 'competitive climate' and the importance of scheduling, nor that the BBC does not 'need to keep a close eye on how our programmes are performing. A great deal of sophisticated work is constantly being carried out to follow audience trends and to help the BBC understand how different groups of people feel about our output.'²⁴

'Quality' has thus become a way of dealing with the contradiction at the heart of public service broadcasting in the digital age: how to 'give value to all licence payers' when you attract less than thirty per cent of the television audience; how to meet the needs of the public without 'pursuing' them. Quality does not describe good television as such, but the ideological framework within which judgements of good television are made.

The concept of *valuable television* raises different questions. Christian Koboldt, Sarah Hogg and Bill Robinson suggest that 'valued programming is defined by viewers – the definition rests on their valuations of what they like, and how much they are prepared to pay for it'.²⁵ But the transformation of the television industry over

²² Andrew Muellier, 'Never mind the quality ...', *The Guardian*, 4 May 1999, G2 p. 17.

²³ Quoted in '£320m season to "innovate" and "engage"', *Ariel*, 23 March 1999, p. 3.

²⁴ Peter Salmon, 'Pillars of the schedule', *Ariel*, 23 March 1999, p. 5. Georgina Born's research inside the BBC explores the ideological contradictions of current BBC management strategy in illuminating detail.

²⁵ Koboldt, Hogg and Robinson, 'The implications of funding for broadcasting output', p. 60.

the last twenty years is such that the new economy of exchange does not just involve viewers. If the only economic measures of television were once audience size (which determined advertising rates) and production costs (which become a common measure of 'quality' programming), the rise of the independent sector and the global television market has meant that other forms of television trade have become significant. Programme pricing is increasingly organized around the rising costs of rights (sports rights most obviously, but increasingly the rights to exploit all sorts of performing talent) and the state of play in the global television market – hence Birt's anxiety that the BBC 'could be cast as a midwife, funding programmes through their development and early screenings only to be powerless to retain the successful ones as creators sell the rights to the highest bidder once established', and Tony Garnett's suggestion that Channel Four should fund programmes only through its advertising income, and that all Channel Four programme rights except first UK showing should be retained by the programmes' makers.²⁶

26 Garnett, 'Notes for the Raymond Williams Memorial Lecture', p. 28. Birt, quoted in Barrie, 'Pay TV warning'.

One of the assumptions of the advocates of quality television is that good programmes depend on good production companies, companies not only driven by the right intentions (the pursuit of excellence rather than profit, diversity rather than security) but also financially able to realize these intentions – with the security of long-term funding, a critical mass of talent, a programme-maker management, and so on (the model of good practice was, of course, the public service BBC). The question is, what happens to television when these terms go unmet? How can valuable television (in economic terms) also be valuable television (in regulatory terms) in a market competing for fragmented audiences, employing a fragmented workforce, and looking to cut costs? The narrative of television's 'decline' since its golden age, whether in terms of dramatic values or by reference to 'faked' documentaries and the lost ethic of truth-telling, becomes a narrative of 'the bloody battle for commissions', the evil effects of market forces.²⁷ If the development of independent production following the launch of Channel Four challenged some of the founding tenets of public service broadcasting, bringing into play a more competition-conscious set of value terms – individuality, speciality, experiment – in the longer term, as Garnett suggests, these are not qualities with much market clout, and any government policy to encourage growth in the television production sector needs to consider the employment conditions that sustain creativity and the development of talent rather than content as such. The work of Andy Cosh's research team on the MEMC programme, for example, makes clear the economic distinction between companies which can establish a long-term production base (usually through the ownership of 'talent' and the making of entertainment) and those which cannot (documentary makers, for example, whose success depends on the

27 Quote taken from Malcolm Moore, Chief Executive, Directors Guild of Great Britain, in a letter to *The Guardian*, 3 June 1999. The letter, titled 'Documenting the fall in TV standards', was a response to *The Guardian's* coverage of a report from the BFI Tracking Study on industry professionals' anxieties about falling ethical and production standards. See 'Cost cuts hit TV quality', 24 May 1999.

²⁸ See Simon Deakin and Stephen Pratten, *Reinventing the Market? Competition and Regulatory Change in Broadcasting*, ESRC Centre for Business Research working paper 134, June 1999.

²⁹ For these points see Koboldt, Hogg and Robinson, 'The implications of funding for broadcasting output', p. 61.

³⁰ This is clear in Born's BBC research, for example.

³¹ This point emerges clearly from Patrick Humphreys's case studies.

³² Patricia Hodgson, Foreword to Graham et al., *Public Purposes in Broadcasting*, p. 1. For a similar approach to television as an industry see Chris Smith's television speeches in *Creative Britain*.

continual selling of 'ideas').²⁸ The effect is to distort the market for independent productions away from 'serious' programming.

One economic issue worth noting here is that there is not a direct relationship between a programme cost and its viewer value (except in the limited case of pay-per-view): the economic relationship of producer and audience is complicated by scheduling policy, advertiser demands, by the role of expectations (viewers may value a programme they expect to enjoy differently once they have seen it) and ideology (we may value programmes like *Newsnight* even if we rarely watch them).²⁹ Potential markets are therefore more important in determining the commissioning, buying and selling prices of programmes than audience judgements themselves; which means, among other things, that an authoritative claim to market knowledge (through market research, for example) can become the basis for influencing decisions about what programmes to make and how to make them.³⁰ What emerges from the MEMC programme's research here is that, far from simplifying the decision-making process, reference to the market value of television (whether the market being described is the individual domestic consumer or the international programme buyer) only complicates it. As with the concept of quality, market value has become part of the context in which decisions about good and bad television are made, but it does not describe the basis of those decisions themselves.³¹

What can be said is that the concept of 'quality' comes back into play here, but in a new guise. It is used, first, as a term to describe an audience rather than a programme – quality television is television appealing to the quality audience, defined in terms of age, class, income, taste. Hence, for example, the argument that the higher quality of US (as against UK) situation comedies reflects US programmers' pursuit of a new generation of more highly educated, media-sophisticated American viewers. The high/low distinction is thus restated in terms of the cultural credentials of the viewers (reminiscent of the way 'progressive rock' was defined against 'dumb pop' in the late 1960s). Commercial success and artistic value are reconciled (as they were by rock): the quality audience equals the affluent audience, and independent producers pitch their programmes accordingly. 'Quality' is also deployed economically to place British television programmes in general in the global market (and to brand the BBC). Quality here refers to what makes British television distinct, and the effect (as in the history of the British film industry) is towards an account of 'Britishness' with global rather than local resonance.

This is the context in which broadcasting can be described as 'a British success story'. 'Britain's broadcasting and telecommunication industries', adds Patricia Hodgson, 'are world class. As their technologies converge, they have the potential to drive real economic growth via a vibrant, combined service sector.'³² But this is also the

³³ Questions now being taken up in the IPPRI's media work.

³⁴ Creative Industries Task Force, *1998 Mapping Document* (London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 1998), p. 107.

³⁵ David Currie and Martin Siner similarly suggest that guaranteed international exposure is now essential for acquiring 'the best available talent'. See 'The BBC: balancing public and commercial purpose', *Public Purposes in Broadcasting*, p. 81.

³⁶ *1998 Mapping Document*, p. 107.

context in which to raise questions about British television companies' underperformance internationally.³³ The *1998 Mapping Document* issued by the Creative Industries Task Force shows that between 1985 and 1996 the balance of trade in the radio and television sector moved from a surplus of £24 million to a deficit of £282 million; and if this reflected the takeoff of cable and satellite services dependent on US programming, the more worrying finding was that 'although the UK has a language advantage over other EU countries, it only exports 1% more programming than Germany or France.'³⁴ *Building a Global Audience*, a Department of Culture, Media and Sport report issued in April 1999, addressed the problem of the UK television industry's export weaknesses directly (noting, among other things, the 'insularity' and 'negativity' of British television drama) and the Department has now put into place a Television Taskforce, drawn (like the Music Taskforce) from the industry, to discuss the issues involved.

MEMC programme research suggests that in discussion of the value of British television as an export industry two immediate questions will need to be answered. Firstly, are the skills being developed and the training provided to sustain the industry in a *global* marketplace? Resting on the laurels of the 'high quality' of British public service broadcasting is no longer an option. Secondly, how do commissioning decisions in the UK (which determine whether and how a programme will be made) relate to the potential value of programmes in the international market? Born's and Humphreys's research shows in different ways how significant international co-funding has become for UK television drama production, but the Cosh study shows too that the global television economy also has implications for the sorts of deals that independent companies are prepared to do with British broadcasters in the first place (in terms of rights control, for example),³⁵ and the consolidation of the independent sector into a small number of very large companies (and a decreasing number of very small ones) may well shift the balance of programme-making power away from UK commissioning editors. Since it took over the Australian production company Grundy, for example, Pearson has derived about seventy per cent of its annual income as a television production company from overseas.³⁶ From this perspective 'good television' is no longer a matter of British cultural judgement.

What is *good television*? According to Chris Dunkley:

There is all the difference in the world between searching your innermost self and giving as honest an account as possible of what you find there, and attempting to create for the sake of public entertainment more of whatever has proved in the past to be most

appealing. It is the difference between the best of the European cinema tradition and the worst of Hollywood, the difference between good books and bad, between the great composer who is trying to show us his soul and the pop music industry which strains perpetually to repeat its last success. What is sad and a little frightening is that there does not seem to be anybody left in British television and, most worrying of all, anybody in BBC drama, who recognises the difference.³⁷

What is interesting about this routine example of Dunkleyism is not its restatement of the art/commerce, high/low cultural distinction, but its assumption that this is the common sense of the educated classes and that what needs explaining is why the distinction is no longer recognized by producers in the BBC. I want to use this assumption as the basis for raising three questions about the ways in which 'good television' is recognized in production practice.

Firstly, it does seem clear that until quite recently (the launching of Channel Four in 1982 marked the beginning of the change) there was a straightforward continuity between ideas of television quality held by the artistic establishment inside and outside television. If Richard Hoggart represented the continuity of Reithian ideas of public service through the Pilkington Report to the Broadcasting Research Unit, so the influence of F.R. Leavis continued to be apparent in the way in which television drama writers and producers talked about their responsibilities.³⁸ Jay Blumler's academic definition of quality television – in terms of freshness, imagination, authenticity, education, truth, social relevance, expressive richness, integrity – is thus confirmed by the group of distinguished writers, producers and executives interviewed by Tim Leggatt in 1991,³⁹ and one can still hear this ideology expressed annually in the speeches at the BAFTA awards ceremony (in 1998's celebrations of *Our Friends in the North* and *Coronation Street*, for instance). In sociocultural terms the shared account of good television here is hardly surprising: television creators have traditionally been recruited from the same educational and social background as the cultural establishment generally; there are clear overlaps between the worlds of television drama and live theatre, of arts programmes and the Arts Council. The question now, then, is whether different patterns of recruitment (Media Studies rather than Oxbridge graduates), different cultural reference points (US cinema rather than the British stage) are, as Chris Dunkley implies, leading to a different, more populist, set of evaluative criteria even of drama.

Secondly, it is equally clear that the concept of quality television and, in particular, its derivation from the defence of producer/artist-led programming from advertiser/profit-driven decisions, has been deployed within television companies as part of the ongoing battle between art and commerce (ongoing equally in the music, film and

38 See John Caughie's forthcoming study of the history of British television drama, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

39 Tim Leggatt, 'Quality in television: the views of the professionals', in S. Ishikawa (ed.), *Quality Assessment of Television* (Luton: University of Luton Press 1996).

publishing industries). In television this battle has taken on a particular shape – pitching producer against manager, gut instinct against market research, and so on – but the immediate question is the effect of this on the relationship between art and craft, on definitions of professionalism. Many of the aesthetic decisions taken as programmes are made are craft decisions: how are these affected by the casualization of television labour, the breakup of craft teams, the dissipation of corporate loyalties?

Thirdly, it is not clear how the audience fits into this picture. Because art is defined against commerce, so there is suspicion of the audience (especially of the audience represented by market research: we can see similar suspicions in the music industry). And this means too a suspicion of the audience aesthetic, of popular taste (the suspicion voiced by Chris Dunkley). In practice, though, as dramas are cast, scripts edited and budget decisions made, audience interests are constantly being implied (even if in resistance to market research).

The problem here, I think, is that while television producers may be overwhelmed by market research data about the size of their audience and its demographic shape, by appreciation indices and focus group reports, they – we – remain really quite ignorant about popular television aesthetics, about viewers' judgements of what makes for good viewing. What does seem clear from research such as David Morrison's *Invisible Citizens* is that most viewers are sophisticated genre readers and have their own version of the 'quality' judgement, dividing programmes into the worthy and the trashy, and taking pleasure from both. The recurring judgements across all programmes are in terms of the technical (good acting, sets, camerawork), the believable, the interesting, the spectacular, the satisfying – terms that echo but do not exactly match the professional concern for originality, authenticity and innovation. Even a straightforward assessment of production values is complicated for viewers by the technical limitations of most television sets – and it is not yet clear whether audience values will change with the marketing of digital sets. What perhaps matters most here is the role of *expectations* (and the routine viewer experience of disappointment). Expectation is the key for television companies because it guarantees that viewers will tune and retune (for subsequent episodes, for this type of show) but it also addresses the questions central to the production process but ignored in most academic analysis, questions about the role of stars and the effects of marketing. For many viewers David Jason is a much better guarantor of quality drama than Dennis Potter, and how programmes are judged has more to do with trailers, adverts and previews in the *Sun* and *Radio Times* than it does with reviews in the *Financial Times* or *The Guardian*. It is no surprise, in short, that casting and promotion budgets are likely ultimately to determine how programmes are assessed, although there

40 See Georgina Born, 'Against negation; for a politics of cultural production: Adorno, aesthetics, the social', *Screen*, vol. 34, no. 3 (1993).

41 Smith quotes are taken from *Creative Britain*, p. 98.

is also a continuing tension from the producer's point of view between providing the same and providing something different.⁴⁰

This brings me to the other end of the black box, to the experience of television, to questions about television culture from the reception end. In his television policy speeches Chris Smith calls for a diversity of provision, for genuine choice for the viewer, for high quality of content. He sees the defining characteristic of public service broadcasting is that 'it puts the viewer first, and no-one else'. This will enable the BBC to continue to act as 'a quality benchmark' for other broadcast material. But such assertions, while commonplace, are not easy to understand. How does 'putting its viewers first' differentiate the BBC from commercial companies which equally have to attract viewers, if only for advertisers? And what does Smith mean by 'quality' here, by good television? 'I said just now that viewers care about television. What that means of course is that they care about content.'⁴¹ But do they? Smith is accepting here, if only by default, the Murdoch argument about market choice, and the question is whether television is really best understood in market terms.

By and large people in the UK pay for a service rather than for programmes, whether through licence fees or subscription, and in assessing the value of their service they do not aim to watch all or even most programmes on it. What matters is having programmes available to watch if required (the possibility of choice is more significant than the viewing choice itself). In this respect the best analogy for the BBC is the public library service. We may not use it much but we are aggrieved if we cannot when we want to, and we expect it to have a range of programmes and programme types: audience research tends to confirm that people are thus content to pay for the making of programmes that they are unlikely themselves to watch. From the public point of view, then, *access* is as significant as *content* (which explains both the problems the BBC has had in defending its digital commitments and the continuing debate about 'listed' sports events). By and large radio/television culture is (like the Internet, but unlike publishing) based on the expectation that programmes are generally accessible and not subject to price restrictions. (In the media generally, individual products, particular books, films, records, magazines, and so on, are priced somewhat arbitrarily – without reference, that is, to their particular costs of production. There is a standard video, CD or paperback price, despite the great variety in costs of production.)

I turn now to viewer judgements of good television programmes: what are the criteria? Three points need to be considered in any answer. Firstly, television has been a medium that depends for its cultural meaning on its 'massness' (like pop music) as much as on

its formal qualities; as a service, television has been organized around events rather than programmes. The 'consumption' of television involves conversation with friends and family, reading news stories about soaps and stars, looking at magazine previews and listings. Television programmes (again like pop records) are 'news' rather than 'art', timebound rather than 'timeless' – whether because the television narrative is itself time constructed (sport, quiz programmes) or because of the way in which television performers cross media to become news phenomena (like the Teletubbies). It follows, secondly, that the events at issue are not necessarily those defined by television (though they often are) but also reflect television's own access to and mediation of public events – the Cup Final, the Death of Diana, and so on. The notion of 'a good programme' is therefore complicated – a bad cup final is a poor spectacle, but this is not a critique of television, and the event-making quality of television has an impact on viewers which is quite different from the routinized commercial (record retailers have long known that a television performance, whether on *Top of the Pops*, *Later*, or the *Mercury Music Prize*, has a much greater sales impact than an advert, even an advert using the same footage). Thirdly, judgements of 'good television' in programme terms are more often made by television professionals in advance than by television viewers on transmission, and such judgements, as I have suggested, have their own contradictions between commercial, technical and aesthetic criteria. There are doubtless attempts in the production process to align professional judgements with market research accounts of what viewers want (see Tony Hall's remarks on BBC news coverage, already cited); but there are also ways in which such alignments are impossible – a source of tension (both creative and destructive) in the industry itself.⁴²

⁴² This tension is clear in comments made in the BFI Television Industry Tracking Study. See Richard Patron, 'Work histories in television', paper given to the 17th Annual International Labour Process Conference, Royal Holloway College, 1999.

The central question to be answered, though, is what is really meant by viewer 'choice'. From a Cultural Studies perspective what viewers do does not necessarily fit a market model. People choose whether to watch television or not, whether to watch a programme being transmitted or one which has been videoed, whether to watch what other people are watching or something else, and so on. Such choices have different bases and may have very little to do with judgements of content or quality, reflecting, rather, household rhythms and requirements. And what is at stake is less often choice as such than *engagement* – which is one reason for the importance of time for television. Television viewing is still in this respect a social activity, a public activity, and the key choice is whether to become part of this society, this public. (From this perspective it seems safe to predict that the digital revolution, convergence, and so on, will supplement 'television viewing' as a social practice with other more individualistic uses of the screen, but not replace it, just as VCRs have made no great difference to television ratings and

television itself did not bring about the end of cinema – video sales simply reflect television viewing and cinema box-office figures.)

In this report I have attempted to draw together the most interesting questions emerging from the Media Economics and Media Culture Research Programme on current changes in British television culture. I want now to return to the question of Television Studies and the future of television research. One conclusion to be drawn immediately from the programme's work is the importance of production studies: studies, that is, which combine economic and sociological analysis, ethnographic and survey methods.⁴³ The organizational culture of television, the new networks of trust and knowledge and the shifting criteria of professionalism are equally shaped by economic pressures (the workings of television's quasi-markets, for instance) and by ideological pressures, by ethical commitments and aesthetic criteria. In examining such issues as the power of commissioning editors, the significance of onscreen stars, the importance of branding, the effects of cost-consciousness pre- and post-production, we are describing an industry which is less and less organized around 'quality' (a criterion of programme excellence defined not by the market but by regulators) and more and more organized around talent (which, among other things, means popularity mediated by the tabloid press, by promotional processes).⁴⁴ This is the context in which concepts like creativity and risk (and, indeed, failure) become problematic, as television companies attempt, for example, to settle on a system of cross-subsidy (the unpopular programme paid for by the popular one) to replace public service structures. And a second conclusion to be drawn from MEMC research is that as the market becomes more important for television production decisions, so comparison with other media, such as the music industry, becomes more fruitful.⁴⁵

But whatever the value of production studies as such, it could also be said that there is an inevitable gap in their analysis. Television companies produce programmes and, in the end, their economic success depends on what happens to these programmes, not just in market terms but also culturally, in the ways they make their mark on viewers. Audience responses to programmes have their own economic effects, through recommissioning, star-making, and so on. This is to bring in a second and third strand of Television Studies: on the one hand textual analysis, on the other Cultural Studies-based audience ethnography. These three strands of television research need to be woven together in ways they have not yet been, if only for disciplinary reasons (I am proposing a research strategy which would cross the current demarcation zone between the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Board).⁴⁶ What is now needed, as the MEMC programme comes to an end, is

⁴³ See also the BFI Tracking Study, and the work on employment in the television industry being developed by labour market researchers such as Gillian Ursell, Richard Saundry and Alan McKinlay.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of this shift in radio broadcasting, see Simon Garfield's fly-on-the-wall study of BBC Radio 1, *The Nation's Favourite: the True Adventures of Radio 1* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999).

⁴⁵ See, for example, Keith Negus, *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures: Strategy and Creativity in the Music Business* (London: Routledge, 1999), a study of the music industry which is clearly helpful in understanding how television production companies are developing to treat global niche markets.

⁴⁶ For an indication of how fruitful a cross-disciplinary approach can be, see the work coming out of the MEMC's Buckingham project: David Buckingham et al., *Children's Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); David Buckingham (ed.), *Television for Children: Texts and Genres* (London: British Film Institute, forthcoming); Hannah Davies et al., *In the Worst Possible Taste: Children, Television and Cultural Value*, unpublished ms.

a television culture research network (equivalent to the Radio Research Group and the Music Industry Research Group), a means to encourage dialogue between all the quite different kinds of researchers who are concerned to make sense of what is happening inside that black box.

The film institute and the rising tide: an interview with Colin MacCabe

Colin MacCabe was appointed to the British Film Institute as Head of Production by the then Director, Anthony Smith, in 1985. It was an unexpected appointment. MacCabe had played a significant role in the development of academic Film Studies in Britain, in his work for Screen, and in the creation of the John Logie Baird Centre in Glasgow. But he had little film industry or filmmaking experience and his appointment meant a new sort of engagement of theory with practice. In 1989, as part of a general reorganization of BFI management under new Director, Wilf Stevenson, MacCabe became Head of Research, a new division which included publishing and education as well as production (though the latter became an autonomous division again a couple of years later). In 1998, following Alan Parker's appointment as Chairman and the subsequent arrival of John Woodward as Director, MacCabe was dismissed: his vision of the BFI was not theirs. In 1999 the BFI was, in turn, absorbed into a new institution, the Film Council, a body designated by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to bring together all the facets of state-funded film activity – production, location, education, and so on. MacCabe's experience, in short, covers a period in which the BFI's role in film culture came to be seen as particularly problematic and in which state bodies such as the Institute faced new systems of financial and political accountability. The problems the BFI faced were not unique to Britain, and we thought it would be instructive in this millennial issue of Screen to invite MacCabe to reflect on his experiences in the BFI. The questions raised – about film culture and the state, about film education and training, about access and knowledge, scholarship and art – will dominate the next decades, too.

John Caughie and Simon Frith

Screen: You joined the BFI Production Division in 1985.

Colin MacCabe: Summer of 1985, yes.

S: Did the Production Division have a brief?

CM: Yes, a very clear brief: to make films that would not otherwise get made. Which, crudely put, meant films that interested us and also interested some other European financiers but which would not get an American distribution advance.

S: Was this on the grounds that this was one way of giving people an entrance into filmmaking, without their having to go out and sell ideas commercially? Or was the idea that these films would be good for people and ought to be made?

CM: I think it was the notion that these things would be good for people. There wasn't a strong professional logic though, in fact, many of the films produced in my time had a significant number of NFTS [National Film and Television School] graduates working on them. And, indeed, the very high level of technical excellence we achieved was often crucially dependent on NFTS graduates. But the ideology and the rationale were not industrial; our job was to use state subsidy to realize individual visions which could not find commercial backing.

S: So the Division didn't see itself as addressing the needs of the film industry, in terms of training or uncovering and nurturing talent?

CM: Absolutely not. It was the case that we felt we were nurturing talent but the justification was in terms of the visions the films promised rather than the industrial needs they might cater to – that was a by-product.

S: As we understand it, the BFI interest in production came out of its commitment to experimental film. Was that concept of experiment still part of your brief?

CM: Yes. The Division had the notion of an existing film industry, an existing television industry, and then a margin, on which something should be done. There was a strong ideology in the seventies that what was needed was an effective *alternative* film industry, and that was also what gave the BFI something very valuable, its distribution and sales arms. But by the time I took over, I think Peter Sainsbury [MacCabe's predecessor as Head of Production] had retreated a long way from that alternative film

industry idea to a more old-fashioned aim: to promote and allow individual vision to reach the screen. You attempted to get round the danger of favouritism by having quite a strong Board [of advisors] chosen from quite a wide range of people. But fundamentally the Board's job was to pick individuals to make films. This was not simply auteur theory. I had a policy, for example, of funding a lot of development with black writers and directors. Ben Gibson [MacCabe's successor as Head of Production] focused very hard, with good effect, on women writers and directors. But that was all at the level of development. When it came to the selection of scripts, it was a clear version of aesthetic excellence which was in play.

S: Were there any financial pressures on you at all? What was your balance sheet supposed to look like?

CM: There was enormous financial pressure but it wasn't a conventional balance sheet. I started out with a million pounds, half from the BFI and half from Channel Four. I made the decision early on that some £200,000 had to go on shorts and about £50,000 on development. After that I had to make at least three feature films which cost, by the end of my time there, about £1 million each, so I had to try to raise some £2 million a year. That was a lot of pressure. But I had my overheads paid for and I always had 25 to 30 per cent of the budget to bring to the table, plus perhaps some revenue from the last successful film. So I didn't have financial targets as such but I was expected to produce two or three features a year, some hits, and a hit for the BFI was a mixture of three things: the judgement of people who devoted their lives to the cinema, international success at festivals, and takings at the domestic box office.

S: Was there any concept of 'Britishness' being significant?

CM: Yes and no. No in the sense that there was no directive from on high to be British. And that changed radically – gradually at first but radically – when Parker and Woodward took over. The pressure – this has got to be British – has come from the Ministry [of Culture, Media and Sport, the BFI's funding source]. When I was there, there was none of that. The international component was very significant: to take British filmmakers to the international stage was a very important part of what we were doing. And I myself felt very strongly that we were looking for areas of British experience that hadn't yet reached the screen. So our films were British in that sense. A Britishness that was not necessarily yet recognized as British in Britain.

S: Were there any requirements of Britishness for who was funded? Could you give money to an Australian passport holder, for example?

CM: As I get older, I become more and more grateful that the Prussians saved Wellington's bacon at Waterloo. The result is that to a degree that is unthinkable in any European country which enjoyed the benefits of Napoleonic conquest there were almost no regulations governing who and who could not get a grant. For example, a German passport holder, Andi Engel, was given half the budget to make a feature film. In any other European country there would probably have been an immense fuss about that. In the BFI there was unbelievably little formal regulation as to who we gave money to. There undoubtedly would have been a fuss if we had given money to people who were obviously making money out of it or to people who could obviously get the money elsewhere, but this didn't arise.

S: So the rationale for your department was simply that you were funding films that wouldn't have been made otherwise?

CM: Yes. The argument was that this film is worth making and no-one else will make it. This also meant that we did think we ought to make something that was quite good.

S: Are you happy with your track record on this?

CM: Yes. I mean I was very lucky. I inherited *Caravaggio* [Derek Jarman, 1986] almost fully funded: this, whatever one thinks about it, was a considerable film and considerably successful. And probably even more importantly I inherited the first half of *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* [Terence Davies, 1988], which was a major hit at Cannes and exactly the kind of hit that justified the existence of the [Production] Board. We made about twelve features when I was in Production and if you said to me now that you've got to watch *Young Soul Rebels* [Isaac Julien, 1991], *On the Black Hill* [Andrew Grieve, 1987] or *Venus Peter* [Ian Sellar, 1989], *Fellow Traveller* [Philip Saville, 1989] or *Friendship's Death* [Peter Wollen, 1987] I'd be more than happy to do so. And the other thing was that we didn't make terrible films. Uncommercial film funders have a record of making awful films and if hits are sort of lucky, you can avoid making terrible films. And in this respect I was pretty happy – there were no very evident flops and I was pleased with films like *Play Me Something* [Timothy Neat and John Berger, 1989] and Andi Engel's *Melancholia* [1989]. They were very small films but *Melancholia* went to Cannes, *Play Me Something* won a big European prize. There's a lot of luck in this but the success of

Distant Voices, Still Lives did mean I was criticism-proof most of the time I was there.

But the most difficult bit of my track record for me to judge is *Young Soul Rebels*. In 1985 it was clear to me as a Londoner that the London experience of Caribbean immigration was a crucial aspect of national life which had not yet reached the screen. I set that as my personal goal. In the summer of 1990, as the BBC shot *Hallelujah Anyhow* (Matthew Jacobs, 1990) and the BFI produced *Young Soul Rebels*, I felt my goal was all but achieved. When *Hallelujah Anyhow* premiered to critical acclaim at the London Film Festival and *Young Soul Rebels* won the Critics Prize at Cannes in 1991 I was sure my aims had been realized. Ten years on not just *Notting Hill* (Roger Michell, 1999) but just about all successful British films are remarkable, amongst other things, for their whiteness. And although the critics at Cannes saw clearly Isaac's talent as a director – *Young Soul Rebels* remains a very impressive directorial debut – there is no doubt that at a certain level of both script and performance we failed.

But my own memories of the time will always be happy ones. I had a wonderful team, a great deputy in Jill Pack, Margaret Matheson was the perfect Chair, and Board meetings were a real treat. If I had a problem I couldn't solve, 'Uncle Tony' Smith always had a solution. And perhaps most important of all, Derek Jarman was always a presence – encouraging, outraging, teeming with ideas.

S: Did you initiate short film funding?

CM: I hired Ben [Gibson] to start the shorts. Peter Sainsbury had in many ways laid the basis for everything I did in production but I think in his later years he had got bored with shorts and was only interested in features. When I got there the BFI wasn't making any shorts at all, and it became clear to me that we would have to do something about that. I'd heard about the Australian No-Frills Fund and I thought we ought to have something like it. I initially appointed Ben to look into video production but together we came up with the new directors idea and he ran it very successfully.

S: What was the response of the industry to BFI Production? Were you just regarded as irrelevant?

CM: It depends who you mean by the industry. What was left of Wardour Street did think we were irrelevant, but then it has to be said that we returned the compliment. If you look at the slick, witty and misleading documentary Alan Parker made in 1986,¹ he actually spends his time on the BFI talking about films made ten years earlier, the most important of which, *Sebastiane* [Derek Jarman,

1 'A Turnip-Head's Guide to British Cinema', part of the *British Cinema: a Personal View* series (Thames Television, 12 March 1986).

1976], wasn't made by the BFI at all! The old British film industry was just ignorant. But the new industry, the Working Titles and the Palaces, the Tim Bevans and Nik Powells, thought we were exactly what they wanted, providing a training ground for directors. We were making good little films and every now and then we'd throw up someone they wanted to use.

S: There is still the question of why the state should subsidise filmmaking. I can see the rationale of the state providing entry points as a way of supporting a UK film industry as a wealth creator. But films like *Distant Voices* or even *Melancholia* could have been made by anyone, by Channel Four, for example.

CM: I don't think they would have been. Neither Terence Davies, at that point in his career, nor Andi Engel would have been able to work with an institution like Channel Four. These were pretty uninstitutionalizable people. And I don't think that the rationale for subsidy was to provide entry points. The rationale was aesthetic excellence, and there was a social rationale too, an argument about what kinds of experience should reach the screen.

S: You may think that, the BFI might think that, but we are talking about Thatcherism! How were your productions justified in terms of government policy?

CM: That's a very interesting question. I never felt that the Thatcherites were much concerned with a rationale for arts policy. They wanted value for money, but we gave them that. And some of them, Lord Gowrie, for instance, had a genuine belief in the value of art. But it was very low down their ideological list.

S: So what is the BFI's production policy now? That the Institute shouldn't be involved in production at all?

CM: To be honest I find it difficult to understand. There seems to be a DCMS [Department of Culture, Media and Sport] view that production doesn't fit in the BFI (probably because they don't like the idea of a duplication of funding bodies – ever since we stopped being under the Office of Arts and Libraries no civil servant seems to have understood the rationale for an active BFI producing arm). And then there's the commercial view – Parker's – that films' value should simply be determined by the market. Put those two together and that means abolish BFI Production. But then there was a howl of protest so they're keeping a small amount of shorts. My own view is that it doesn't necessarily matter about features. If you look at it in the long view, the BFI has been in and out of features and I'm not against the argument that this may be a period when we get

out of features – there's so much other money sloshing around. But it does seem to me that a film institute, an academic and educational institute that wants to be a genuine centre and focus, has to be involved in filmmaking.

S: Is the BFI's production policy still aesthetically based?

CM: You'd have to ask Roger Shannon [new Head of Production] that, but I think he'd probably use a decentralizing argument, explaining policy in terms of regional development and/or training.

S: If you take it from the seventies, there was then a sense in which the state, through the BFI, was subsidizing oppositional films; then in the eighties it was subsidising a kind of parallel industry; and now the shift is towards the BFI as a tributary which services the industry.

CM: Yes, but the industry has always said that. In the end, there is only one industry, and if you look at the record of the BFI in terms of talent and aesthetics it's fantastic, it really is. And you could probably make an economic argument on the basis of its record. But the argument about what we were doing was not economic. There is a case for the state subsidy of the arts, particularly arts like film which, unlike writing, are just impossible to create individually. How you then choose those films is a very, very difficult question, but such an operation – and the attempt to answer that question – is crucial for the life of a film institute.

S: In 1989, Wilf Stevenson asked you to be Head of Research. Why did he do that? Had there been any BFI research?

CM: No. I mean what he was doing was first of all administrative. Tony Smith had run a lot of small departments – *Sight and Sound*, Publishing, Education – directly. Wilf wanted them all put together with Production under the title Research. There was a flagship idea that this new department would introduce graduate education into the BFI.

S: What was his thinking here?

CM: The first thing to say about Wilf is that he had a brilliant administrative mind. He came to the BFI from higher education and I think he just saw that the activities of the BFI were an unparalleled educational resource. I think it was also in his mind that the BFI had generated a phenomenal level of expertise, people like John Gillett and David Meeker. These were people, often without higher education, who had turned themselves into world-class scholars and

critics both because they loved film and because the Institute had offered them chances to develop and grow. That had been an earlier historical era. Now we had a new situation where although many of our employees had degrees in film studies, they didn't have that mixture of scholarship and practice which really made up the Institute's expertise. The MA was designed to produce that knowledge both for the Institute but also, and more importantly, for the industry and the academy.

That was the thinking behind the MA, which took up most of my time between 1991 and 1995. Before that I had accomplished my other task which was to reform Publishing and *Sight and Sound*. When he left the Institute, Anthony Smith said the only difficult job he'd had was hiding the extent of *Sight and Sound's* subsidy! I had to put Publishing and *Sight and Sound* on a more economic basis. And by economic I don't mean profit-making, but increasing the ratio of turnover to staff. And we did. We quadrupled or quintupled the number of books we were making; *Sight and Sound* was put on a long path to a nil subsidy. Meanwhile Ben Gibson [now Head of Production] was very unhappy reporting to me (it felt like a demotion of the post) and although I would like to have kept Production as part of Research, after about two years that split off. If Wilf's original notion of a Research division had any merit, then in the long term it would combine Production and Education. But I have never believed in compelling people to work for me. I had recruited Ben and I had promoted him. If he felt that he needed to work by himself he was probably right in the short term.

S: University film teachers were, as you know, very hostile to your MA. In retrospect this may have had less to do with a fear of direct competition for good graduates (and graduate funds) than with an anxiety about the BFI's new relationship to education. The feeling was that instead of being a service centre, the hub of the Film Studies constituency, the BFI was becoming autonomous.

CM: But the idea was not to become an autonomous unit but to create a much wider constituency. My worry was about the effects of the setting up of Film and Media Studies as separate academic departments. Not that they were not doing good work, particularly on the historical front, but as they became more and more mainstream within academia, they were also becoming less and less influential in central academic thinking. My argument was that we had to recast the net, as it were, to have a much wider educational address than had been built up by the [BFI] summer schools and *Screen*. But whether this was right or wrong in impetus, it certainly failed in practice because all I managed to do was alienate my existing constituency without creating a new one. I felt, and I think others in the BFI felt, that we were not bound by the current disposition of

academic departments. Our duties were to film and television and to the audiences. Universities were part and parcel of what we were doing, but Film and Media Studies departments shouldn't be the only constituency to determine the ways in which film should be studied.

S: Perhaps it was inevitable that film departments which had been established with BFI support and initial subsidy, but which by necessity now had to follow (or resist) academic fashions in Media and Cultural Studies, should begin to wonder if the BFI was still on their side.

CM: But what could I have done to demonstrate that? If I'd taken all the money that we put into the MA and distributed it to the universities, I calculate that each film department would have got £700. And the BFI had used labour very intensively addressing very small constituencies in the 1970s and 1980s. That strategy had paid off but now we needed to use that labour to address much wider audiences. And that meant giving up the kind of individual attention that people in Film Studies expected. The MA was the key part of that strategy. However, although this had been laid out in policy paper after policy paper, Parker and Woodward never got the argument. Although they never said this to my face, the strategy was constantly described as elitist. Whether this was stupidity or malice, I simply don't know.

S: What was happening to the schools part of BFI Education?

CM: I was always opposed to the development of Media Studies, which I saw as intellectually without any rigour and destined for every kind of academic sideline. But when I was head of Production, Tony [Smith] was always telling me that it was the Education Department's championing of Media Studies that had given the Institute its greatest successes, and Wilf [Stevenson] repeated this when he took over.

But I didn't realize quite how catastrophic the situation was until the mid nineties when we undertook surveys that found that not only was the subject often poorly taught but also that it almost never used film and often not much television. So not only did Media Studies have little academic or scholarly standing, but it was also failing to carry out the core aims of the BFI's Royal Charter. When you add to that a government which says that it is not going to train any teachers in Media Studies (they've got to be trained in the core curriculum) you get a situation objectively more terrible than even my personal prejudices had begun to calculate. My gut feeling that we had abandoned the core curriculum at our peril proved truer than I had feared. This was the time, about 1995, when I started to look seriously at what we were doing and comparing it very unfavourably

with a body like Film Education. And that was when I actively tried to direct our educational work and to take film and television back into the central curriculum. I ran into incredible opposition from my Education Department. So adamant was this opposition that in the end I had to run our research project on literacy and the media [which considered the place of film and television alongside print texts in the learning of reading skills] by myself.

S: If we go back to the original question – why should the state be doing these things? – from your account Wilf Stevenson had two arguments. On the one hand, the BFI already had all these resources. We're paying for them anyway so let's use them in our educational activities. On the other hand, unless we develop a new generation of what we might call BFI scholars, the BFI won't be able to function in the future. And so BFI education should also be about producing our own expertise. What's happened to these ideas under the new regime?

CM: Don't ask me, chum!

S: Let's take this down to a more banal level. Where, now, would someone train to be a film archivist?

CM: East Anglia.²

S: So it could be argued that the things Wilf Stevenson was concerned about are now being done.

CM: No. If you look at things like production and distribution, where are you going to find the people to do this kind of work? In the sixties they were produced politically but that generation is dead. Or if not dead they're thinking about retirement. And there has been little replenishment. In these areas Wilf was quite right to be worried, and even in skills like librarianship or archiving not everything, I think, can be learned academically. Some of the Meeker skills can be learned in an archive, but some of them you learn from being on the street, and the BFI MA was meant to provide a little street experience in a way that I suspect the East Anglia degree, good as I know it is, probably doesn't.

S: The question here is how the needs of the BFI relate to the needs of the industry.

CM: We were meant to sit down. There was a promise that there was going to be a big round table where Parker and Woodward and everyone would sit down and discuss education. That never materialized. The only time I had a serious conversation with Parker

was when Woodward had terminated my contract and ordered me from the building. I had told him that I was teaching a seminar at six o'clock that evening and unless he had me removed from the building by force I was going to teach it. Parker turned up and graciously allowed me a week to clear my desk. I then asked Parker why on earth he wasn't fighting for what I saw as a proper educational role for the BFI. And to my utter astonishment he just said that the DCMS didn't want it. I was absolutely flabbergasted that he seemed to think that his role owed nothing to film or its history but simply to the wishes of the current government ministry. My view was that the Institute should regard the DCMS as part of the ever-changing political furniture. It should not be determining the BFI's core aims.

S: But wasn't it Wilf Stevenson who redefined the BFI as representing the film industry's interests?

CM: That's true. Very early in his directorate Wilf was made secretary to that film industry lobbying group which trooped off to see Margaret Thatcher. And he took that very seriously – against the advice of every senior member of the BFI, I might say. And at one level, the Film Council is entirely Wilf's design. I also think it's the wrong design. The culture and the industry both have genuine interests and they are not the same. They should cooperate as much as possible, they should not be needlessly and stupidly at loggerheads, but there are different interests here which should be recognized as such. The industry wants, quite rightly, to sell as many films as possible this year; we are interested in *sub specie aeternitatis*!

S: How should the BFI relate to other film education institutes, the National Film and Television School, for example?

CM: If you were starting out with a clean sheet of paper then I think the argument for having the NFTS and the BFI as one and the same organization is very strong. The NFTS is on the side of culture, even if it's producing technicians for the industry. This is exactly what all this lottery money for filmmaking is proving: you need people who've done more than taken an ad in *Variety* and done a day course on how to write a script.

S: What about the meaning of 'national' here. How is the BFI's brief affected by devolution?

CM: The cinema more than any other art form seems to me to give the lie to regionalism. In terms of both audience and infrastructure, size matters. The most important policy for a small region is to give

it good cinemas. And support those with subsidy. If you take Britain, we are sitting in the only city [Glasgow] other than London which can seriously be a focus for media activity. And that's partly because Scotland is a nation, but more importantly because there is talent that would prefer to work in Glasgow than London. You show me another region where that's true and I'll say let's fund it. If not, I'll say let's fund cinemas. As it is, money is going into projects in too small amounts to be significant and being handed out in ways which have everything to do with arguments about equal regional shares and nothing to do with aesthetic excellence. The drive for this is going to increase. Europe is going to demand more and more of this kind of regional funding. But to decide what is appropriate to each region needs serious discussion. It shouldn't be imposed. The regions have to be able to say no, we don't want a slice of the production cake, we want to spend all our money on exhibition. At the moment people think that the only way to get another hundred thousand is to set up a little production fund.

S: What is the BFI's relation to the Arts Council in such arguments?

CM: I don't know enough about the current situation to comment. When I was at Production, I was delighted that Dave Curtis [Film Officer at the Arts Council of Great Britain] was funding film and video art. It was good to have a different funding sensibility. I mean, do you want to monopolize taste? We're talking about aesthetics here. I was very clear that in our department mine would be the major voice in determining what we funded. But that had to mean, first, that my stay was limited and, second, that I would be looking to foster different funders. But if you're looking at it purely bureaucratically there was very little reason why Dave Curtis wasn't part of our operation.

S: Let's turn to a completely different issue. To what extent is the British film industry now tied into the television industry? What does this mean for the BFI?

CM: My own view is that a moribund and hopeless film industry lobbied very successfully to participate in the destruction of the best television industry in the world. What the government should have been doing for the last fifteen years was developing ways to distribute and encourage the small-scale television film out into the cinemas. Instead of which the producers with the large cigars and the desire to live like the French³ have been arguing for the state subsidy of an industry which has no record at all – and they have been, to my astonishment, remarkably successful at persuading government. And we're just going to have to wait. I mean, we're two years into this lottery money and I don't know if there's one film that's worth

3 Ben Gibson's phrase in a verbal report on yet another European meeting where the British faction were arguing for a Hollywood in Europe.

seeing. I haven't seen it. And meanwhile the financial base of the television industry has been hit and hit and hit again. There is a strong economic argument to say that the only serious assets the film industry has are stars, and at any one time there are only going to be eight to ten global stars, who will always live or be focused, as it were, through one city, Los Angeles. There is no point in shredding not just five pound notes but five million pound notes to set yourself against this. You have to work on a different level, like television.

S: So what is the BFI's responsibility to television, to television scholarship?

CM: The MA was an MA in cinema and television, and one of the things Laura [Mulvey] and I spent a lot of time working on in the last couple of years was making that television component a reality. And the [National Film and Television] Archive archives all of British television. So the BFI is certainly aware of this commitment. On the other hand, it must be said that Alan Parker is simply not interested in television; he's only interested in film. It was striking that the first thing Parker and Woodward closed down was the small production unit BFI Television. I had put much time and energy into this development, which again was Wilf's idea, and we'd reached huge audiences at almost nil cost to the BFI. In particular the Century of Cinema project, which saw sixteen programmes produced at a cost of \$5 million plus, without any direct contribution from the BFI, was perhaps my single most important achievement.⁴ But all the contacts and goodwill I had established were literally thrown away.

S: Do you think the constituency John Woodward once represented [Britain's independent television programme producers, PACT] would regard the BFI as having any relevance for them?

CM: No, I don't think so. Some of them are fond of it. Some of them hate it. Not enough of them have the faintest idea what it does. In the late eighties I thought that was fine but it became clear to me through the nineties, as Thatcherism's mantra of value for money worked its way through the body politic, that it wasn't fine at all. The point is that the BFI costs every British taxpayer 74p a year. And the reality of today is that you have to be able to justify that 74p not just to industry people but also to every reader of the *Daily Mail*. At the same time it has to be said that I never felt in any way threatened by my Tory political masters as I did by New Labour from day one. I mean these people have done Cultural Studies courses so they know that art is a bourgeois con-trick, whereas the Tories had a residual belief in the virtues of art while being quite uninterested in it.

⁴ The Century of Cinema invited directors from Scorsese to Oshima, from George Miller to Mrinal Sen to make personal essays about the history of their own national cinema.

S: But Chris Smith's policy does raise one broader question, about access. There is now a commitment that everyone in Britain should have access to film together with a recognition that cultural access is useless unless people have some sense of what it is they're getting access to.

CM: And that does make sense. I mean, I don't want in any way to pretend that I think the BFI was wonderful, you know, that everything in its garden was rosy. The BFI had for at least thirty years, perhaps longer, addressed a relatively small, university-educated audience, already interested in film, and it had addressed it extremely well. On the other hand this was a very small audience, and I think the job was to enlarge the audience, which does mean much greater access without thinking that means collapsing all educational activity into one. The aim wasn't to give up what we did. It was to develop the complementary activities which would enable us to say that we are worth 74p for every taxpayer. Our strategy here was called BFI 2000, and I don't think it was bad as a strategy, but we failed lamentably to put it into practice. And this was when we died as an institution. It was Labour's choice to bring Alan Parker in, but it was not Labour's choice to say that this institution has run into the ground. I can't give you an explanation of that yet because I certainly bear some responsibility. I'll probably have to write a book to determine how much!

S: Let's look at this issue of access a little more closely. Presumably MOMI [The Museum of the Moving Image] was the BFI's most determined (and costly) attempt to give the public a different kind of access to film culture and on a much broader scale than anything it had attempted before.

CM: Yes, and it was very successful.

S: In what terms? Attendance figures? The advance of the public understanding of film? Take a second issue. In the last decade – perhaps because of the development of the video market – film culture has become a significant part of popular culture in ways that were quite unexpected. For example, look at a general cultural magazine like *Time Out* and you'll find that a majority of its cover pictures every year are film stars. There is now a boom in film magazines. What is *Sight and Sound*'s place here? Is it just another film magazine, which happens to come out of the BFI? Is there any real reason to compete with *Empire*? Or, if *Sight and Sound* is doing something different, does it need to create a different market?

CM: This we did think about on a daily basis. The same question came up in publishing. You've got Faber, you've got OUP, etcetera.

5 The revamped *Sight and Sound* inherits the (now defunct) *Monthly Film Bulletin*'s remit to record and review every current film release in the UK.

On the other hand the levels of scholarship and the kind of devotion to film which you get with BFI Publishing you will not get replicated elsewhere. Similarly with *Sight and Sound*. Whether the front half of the magazine stays may be arguable, but no-one else would provide the back half.⁵ And here you run into a different argument: the back half of the magazine provides a public service that is ripe for electronic use. It could be *the* database for the world. Now if we'd been a commercial company, that's what it would be. As it is, it's still lumbering along. We've been saying for years that we've got to go electronic and nothing happens and I just don't understand that. It is the most immediate example of how I feel I failed absolutely, but I still don't quite know why I failed – a free market ideologue would say you failed because you were stuck in a state-run bureaucracy which can't do that kind of thing.

S: But MOMI happened and you see that as a success.

CM: MOMI was a success, but even it desperately now needs upgrading. The trouble with MOMI was that it was a white lie. We said to the DNH [Department of National Heritage, predecessor to the DCMS], we will never ask you for a penny for it. And, of course, basically it did just cover its costs. But in reality it was always going to need a huge investment over and above its running costs to keep it developing. But it was a public success and it is a model of how the BFI could do this kind of more popular work.

S: Is there any evidence that the people, the kids who go into MOMI, then go and watch movies?

CM: No. MOMI addressed a wider audience but we didn't recruit it in any way to our core audience. There were various proposals, like making sure that every child saw four films properly projected, but we didn't really think about this seriously. In fact almost everybody in the BFI was rather sniffy about MOMI; it was considered terribly downmarket. So it wasn't as if its potential was seized institutionally. Indeed, if I were to point to the two major internal failures in the BFI, the first was the decision to hitch our wagon to Media Studies and the second was that we didn't use the museum to refocus the whole Institute.

S: What about the National Film Theatre?

CM: The National Film Theatre has a major problem which is that it is on the South Bank and not on a very nice bit of the South Bank.⁶ So I fully supported a move to the West End and I think that was a crucial part of our future strategy. It has been decided, though, that the BFI should stay on the South Bank. My first reaction is that that

6 The NFT, which forms part of London's South Bank arts complex, is situated at some geographical and cultural distance from the West End, home to the film industry as well as to the BFI's headquarters.

is very bad news. A BFI showcase cinema in the West End of London where people can see what we are doing would have been a quantum leap. But perhaps the South Bank is finally going to become part of Central London.

S: A final question: your title was Head of Research but your responsibilities clearly covered a lot of things people probably wouldn't think of as research. What should the BFI's research role be?

CM: When I started I was very optimistic about generating an internal research culture, but it soon became clear that it was going to be a much longer project. The first step was the MA and it really was working. If someone wants to know how the BFI worked in the 1990s all they have to do is go and read all the placement reports written by the students in the period 1991 to 1999. They are certainly more informative than the ludicrous documents produced by the management consultants. The second step was to tap into the Research Councils. This was less successful and I still think there is a very large question mark as to how the state should be funding research on the media. But the third step (and this was the justification for the London Consortium [an educational collaboration between the BFI, Birkbeck College, the Architectural Association and the Tate Gallery] and, more importantly, the literacy and media research project) was to seek a new settlement between the traditional humanities and the study of film and television. The trouble is that Film and Television Studies was set up in departments which were simply too small. And that separation has been terrible for the traditional humanities. They were cut off from contemporary culture and their work (even if it's on Renaissance theatre or the Victorian novel or modernist poetry!) is consequently weaker. But then in this argument I feel like King Canute. . . .

S: A good time to stop the tape, before the tide comes in.⁷

⁷ Since this interview was completed, Alan Parker and John Woodward have moved on to run the Film Council. Joan Bakewell has been appointed Chair of the BFI. Woodward's deputy, Jon Teckman a former DCMS civil servant, is the new BFI Director.

Television in transit

WILLIAM BODDY

Every electronic media product launch or network debut carries with it an implicit fantasy scenario of its domestic consumption, a polemical ontology of its medium and an ideological rationale for its social function. The scattered public record of these self-representations, in the ephemeral forms of television commercials, corporate press releases and trade press reporting, illuminate the larger contexts and implicit assumptions within which media firms operate. The current period of confusion and conflict among the would-be architects of our putative post-television age offers a productive site to investigate the ways in which, at the turn of the century, wider social, technological and political changes may deform or put into crisis such calculated representations of media apparatus and artefact. The recent record of technological change within the electronic media has repeatedly demonstrated the ability of industry leaders and political figures quickly to adopt or discard elaborate policy and aesthetic rationales to serve shifting commercial and political advantage. At the same time, it is unclear whether media scholars have been equally responsive to historical changes in the media landscape, changes which might provoke a re-examination of some of the long-standing biases and blind spots of Film and Television Studies as it was intellectually constituted in an earlier era of broadcasting.

The first four decades of postwar US television, dominated by the formidable economic and cultural power of three network firms, is noteworthy beyond the phenomenal economic prosperity and relative structural stability that the industry enjoyed. As the television industry consolidated itself within US economic and cultural life, a remarkably consistent and enduring set of ideas about the general nature and function of the television medium was also elaborated. Responding in complex ways to the self-promoting discourses of

industry interests, including network defences of their market power, a web of 'commonsensical', if largely implicit, propositions about the medium permeated public discussions of the medium. These assumptions found a place within both popular and elite criticism of television, were invoked by both defenders and antagonists of the industry, and guided policymakers and legislators concerned with the medium. For nearly half a century media scholarship and popular culture in the USA have shared a general view of the television medium as quotidian, advertising-dominated, audio-driven, visually impoverished, female-centred and passively consumed. Unlike the cultural positioning of cinema since the 1940s, increasingly associated with the possibilities for artistic status, personal expression, cosmopolitanism and high cultural prestige, US television was constructed in terms of its domesticity, liveness, and its role as an indispensable agent of national identity. The significance of the current period of technological innovation within moving-image culture is suggested by the ongoing erosion of the consensus regarding many of these traditional propositions about the nature and uses of commercial television.

If many of the truisms about US commercial television can be traced back to the era of network ascendancy of the mid 1950s, such associations endured long after network power began to fade after the 1970s. At the same time, the discipline of Cinema Studies in the USA is responding in mixed fashion to changes in electronic media, including retreats into cinephilic connoisseurship, nostalgic laments about 'the end of cinema', and a rhetoric around media infiltration and corruption. The traditional opposition in reception sites between the domestic television receiver and the public cinema screen, with its persistent gender implications, has been challenged both by the growing popularity of domestic home theatre installations and by the prospect of the electronic distribution and projection of feature films in public cinemas. While representing the lamentable 'domestication' of the theatrical film experience for some critics, the 1990s home theatre boom has provided new masculinist pleasures of technological fetishism and feature film collecting, and has arguably changed the modes of attention and sociality around which at least some television is consumed in the home. More significantly, prospective changes associated with digital delivery and recording media in the home promise further to destabilize traditional notions of the nature of television, its audience and its links to national identity.

It is symptomatic of the current unsettled state of the US television industry generally that the mid-1999 commercial launch of the seemingly prosaic 'personal video recorder' (PVR), a VCR-like appliance which records programmes on a computer hard drive and downloads programme schedules overnight via an internal modem, has already provoked apocalyptic warnings of the death of

1 Bill Carter, 'Aiming a little persuasion at makers of TV recorders', *New York Times*, 16 August 1999, p. C5.

2 Bill Carter, 'Replay networked to appoint ex-CBS programmer as chief', *New York Times*, 16 September 1999, p. C8.

3 Replay executive Steve Shannon, quoted in 'Here at last: a brainy VCR', *Toronto Star*, 29 August 1999, np.

4 Nicholas Negroponte, *Being Digital* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), pp. 168–9.

5 Bill Gates, *The Road Ahead* (New York: Penguin, 1995), p. 66. Microsoft, through its WebTV subsidiary, is developing its own version of the personal video recorder.

commercial television from some television executives. While a number of major studios and television networks have responded to the PVR by making direct investments in the two startup manufacturers of the new devices, Replay Networks Inc. and TiVo Inc., other established media companies have threatened to sue the same firms for copyright infringement. Four large media companies – Walt Disney, CBS, the News Corporation and Discovery Communications – have, in fact, both made direct investments *and* threatened to sue the PVR manufacturers.¹ Other corporate investors in Replay and TiVo include Sony, Philips, DirecTV, America Online and NBC; individual investors include Paul Allen (co-founder of Microsoft and America's third wealthiest individual), and Netscape founder Marc Andreessen. Emphasizing the ambiguous status of the new storage device within the television industry was Replay's selection in September 1999 of Kim LeMasters, a former chief programmer for CBS, as the company's chairman and chief executive officer.²

One of the novel features of the PVR is its ability to record and replay material at the same time, allowing viewers to record an on-air programme as they watch it, walk out of the room for an interval, and resume viewing the recording at the point at which they left, jumping past commercials on playback as desired. Replay's vice-president of marketing reported that tests of the device among consumers indicated that 'after they've had the unit a while they stop watching live TV'.³ This new form of timeshifting is merely one sign of the ways in which digital technology, at least in the eyes of many current industry leaders and pundits, is eroding the experience of simultaneity and liveness that has been traditionally seen both as part of television's essential nature and central to its relation to the nation. MIT's Nicholas Negroponte predicted in 1995 that 'digital life will include very little real-time broadcast. . . . With the possible exception of sports and elections, technology suggests that TV and radio of the future will be delivered asynchronously'.⁴ In the same year, Microsoft CEO Bill Gates nostalgically described the communal aspects of the traditional live national television broadcast as instrument of national unity: 'When we Americans share national experiences, it is usually because we're witnessing events all at the same time on television – whether it is the *Challenger* blowing up after liftoff, the Super Bowl, an inauguration, coverage of the Gulf War, or the O.J. Simpson car chase. We are 'together' at those moments'. However, Gates argued, 'it is human nature to find ways to create synchronous communications into asynchronous forms'.⁵ Notwithstanding such debatable appeals to human nature and technological will in predicting the decline of the live nationwide broadcast, other observers have expressed scepticism about the significance of the entire project of television as agent of national identity, a central

6 'Whither television?', *New York Times*, 4 January 1999, p. A18.

7 Bill Carter, 'Will this machine change television?', *New York Times*, 5 July 1999, p. C1.

8 *Ibid.*

9 'Taking the ads out of television', *The Economist*, 8 May 1999, np.

10 'Networks buy into new personalized TV technology', *Calgary Herald*, 19 August 1999, p. F5.

11 Robin Berger, 'The name of Tercek's game is interactive', *Electronic Media*, 13 September 1999, p. 22.

tenet of the network broadcasting era. As the *New York Times* briskly advised in a January 1999 editorial: 'to the lament that we are losing a sense of national community as television grapples with its recombinant future, there is only one thing to say: Get a life'.⁶

If the prospect of digital delivery and storage of television programming has put into crisis the longstanding privileging of the live nationwide broadcast as guarantor of national cohesion, the digital PVR has also reignited debates in the US going back to the 1950s over advertising-supported versus subscription-supported television. The ease with which viewers might skip commercials recorded via the new device has led some industry observers to offer doomsday scenarios for commercial television, as declining advertising revenues force networks to bail out of bidding wars with pay-television firms for the most desirable programming. One Young & Rubicam executive told the *New York Times*: 'I think conventional television, while not quite dead, is going to do a slow death here', and the chairman of Viacom's MTV Networks told the paper: 'I hate to think about Replay and TiVo. We kind of like the world the way it is now.'⁷ At the same time, the television networks in the 1990s seem uncertain about how to couch the perceived threat to commercially-supported television in the ideological terms of their 1950s opposition to pay-television proposals. According to Garth Ancier, head of NBC Entertainment, the prospect of the migration of the most popular television programmes from advertiser-supported to pay-television brought about by the ad-busting PVR 'is either anti-American or totally American, depending on how you look at it'.⁸

The prospect of masses of television viewers using their PVRs to evade television commercials has also led to predictions that advertisers and broadcasters will respond by creating advertising formats impossible for viewers to escape, including intensive product placement within programmes, onscreen banner advertisements and programme-length commercials.⁹ A spokesperson for Replay Networks told journalists in August 1999: 'We know there will be people who want to skip commercials. The goal for us is to find other ways for companies to deliver their messages.'¹⁰ Robert Tercek, senior vice-president of digital media for the Columbia-TriStar Television Group at Sony Pictures, described the programming logic of Sony's partnership with WebTV and TiVo by invoking two US catalogue clothing retailers: 'There's no reason why TV programs in this new media have to be 30 minutes or an hour long. In fact, there are a lot of reasons why you want to make them shorter. It costs you a lot to keep an audience there. . . . J. Crew could be a show – it already is a show, look at the catalog. Or Abercrombie & Fitch. Catalogs already attempt to create a narrative drama to give their products more mystique.'¹¹

One feature of the PVR of enormous appeal to networks and

12 'Companies consider ways to target TV advertising', *Marketing News*, 15 March 1999, p. 11.

13 Junko Yoshida, 'Digital VCRs packing HDDs seen as first front in war to establish non-PC home networks', *Electronic Engineering Times*, 2 August 1999, np.

14 Jon Healey, 'New technology customizes television program selection to viewer's tastes', *San Jose Mercury News*, 18 August 1999, np.

15 John Markoff, 'Two makers plan introductions of digital VCR', *New York Times*, 29 March 1999, p. C13.

16 Janet Rae-Dupree and Richard Siklos, 'Here's the next big thing', *Business Week*, 9 August 1999, p. 38.

17 Ibid.

18 'Here at last: a brainy VCR', np.

advertisers is its ability continuously to track users' viewing preferences, offering sponsors and broadcasters the long-sought ability to deliver tailored commercials to individually-targeted consumers. General Motors, for example, has partnered with TiVo to allow the replacement of a GM broadcast advertisement with a commercial previously downloaded on the household's PVR, one tailored to the consumer's specific viewing habits.¹² As one industry official told *Electronic Engineering Times*: 'We are beginning to see some system operators setting aside a portion of the HDD [hard disk drive] real estate for revenue-producing applications'. The trade journal explained that this choice was made in preference to 'leaving the entire storage space under the consumer's control'.¹³ In the TiVo device, viewers are asked to make simple 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' responses to programmes titles on the weekly programme guide; the device then aggregates these preferences for use by advertisers. Despite the rudimentary nature of such viewer data, Jim Barton, TiVo's chief technical officer, told the press that 'there's actually not that many different types of people. . . . They tend to (fall into) socioeconomic buckets.'¹⁴

The opposing scenarios conjured up by the PVR, of technologically-empowered television viewers rebelliously zapping commercials or unknowingly being sold to advertisers in ever more perfectly commodified form, suggest the extent to which digital technologies evoke wildly differing scenarios of domestic television viewing. In this regard, the PVR represents one step towards the long-anticipated merging of the television set with the computer monitor, a convergence which activates distinct connotations of media use. As John Markoff of the *New York Times* writes of the PVR: 'The idea is to permit people to use television the way Web surfers now use the Internet',¹⁵ including the construction of customized viewer 'channels' of favourite programmes. *Business Week* saw in the launch of the two competing PVRs a 'race to convert television from a one-way affair into an Internet-age interactive medium',¹⁶ and this persistent opposition between interactive Web user and passive television viewer is pervasive in discussions of digital television.

In addition to its effects on television advertising, another source of intense industry interest in the PVR stems from its potential as an Internet access provider and tool for what *Business Week* calls 'couch commerce'.¹⁷ As one journalist explained: 'If you like the shirt being worn by Bill Cosby on his sitcom . . . all you'll have to do to purchase it is press a button on your remote and be linked to the site of a major retailer or manufacturer, which already have all your measurements and credit card information'.¹⁸ In August 1999, America Online (AOL), the largest Internet service provider in the USA with twenty million subscribers, announced it had acquired a minority stake in TiVo. Bob Pittman, president of AOL, said at the

19 'TiVo and America Online announce alliance for AOL TV', *Business Wire*, 17 August 1999, np.

20 Kelly Carroll and Brian Quinton, 'Gaining ground on a giant', *Telephony*, 23 August 1999, np.

21 Jim Porter, president of Disk/Trend Inc., quoted in Yoshida, 'Digital VCRs packing HDDs', np.

22 Carter, 'Will this machine change television?', p. C1.

23 Ernest Holsendolph, 'Play it again; or, maybe, for the first time', *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 22 August 1999, p. 1p; N'Gai Croal, 'Relplay that funky television show', *Newsweek*, 3 May 1999, p. 67.

time that 'AOL has always focused on making the online experience a key part of our members' lives. As consumers want to extend that interactive experience to devices beyond the PC, we see TiVo as a great way to help us deliver our hallmark, ease-of-use and convenience, to the television.'¹⁹ At the same time, rivals to AOL see Internet-enabled PVRs as a way to challenge AOL's Internet access dominance by expanding Internet provision beyond the computer desktop. Such a shift involves the speculative redefinition of the traditional television screen, its location, and the nature of social interaction around it. An executive at the AT&T-owned Excite@Home told the trade journal *Telephony*: 'We expect that a high percentage of consumers will want both TV and PC Internet. . . . The PC experience in the den is typically very task-oriented, whereas the television experience is more driven by convenience.'²⁰ One industry official noted that the central question about the success of PVR remained 'how couch potatoes might respond to potentially interactive features'.²¹ As the *New York Times* put it: 'some question whether ReplayTV and TiVo, in predicting revolution, are misreading how viewers watch television: as either passive lumps not sure what they want until they notice that it is on, or as reflexive hunters for new, unanticipated viewing alternatives'.²²

The now familiar rhetoric of empowerment, freedom and interactivity has marked much of the press coverage of the PVR, frequently explicitly contrasting the active, in-command viewer of new interactive television with that fabled and disreputable figure of the previous era of three-network broadcasting, the passive couch potato. However, at least some observers have expressed scepticism about the likelihood of the PVR overturning the long-established image of the television audience. One journalist concluded that the PVR 'allows the couch potato to settle even deeper into the cushions', and an enthusiastic *Newsweek* reviewer concluded that 'you may never get up off that couch again'.²³

While it remains to be seen whether US consumers will demonstrate much of an appetite for the timeshifting and interactive capabilities of the new PVR, it is clear that digital delivery and storage systems have already shaken some of the longstanding conventional notions of television's purported essence, reception and social function. As powerful firms within and outside the television industry improvise strategies of competition and alliance around the introduction of digital products and services, new self-serving fantasies of the medium's nature and use will undoubtedly be offered to consumers and regulators. Despite their frequently ephemeral nature and regardless of their ultimate efficacy or accuracy, such instrumental fantasies of consumption frequently speak eloquently of the larger cultural ambivalence surrounding new communications technologies. Scholars in Screen Studies have much to learn from close attention to such frankly commercial discourses.

Feminist theory and women's films at the turn of the century

ALISON BUTLER

What kind of future might there be for feminist film, or for its new media offspring? What possibilities have been opened up – and what shut down – by its past? These are among the issues addressed by B. Ruby Rich's recent book, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement*,¹ which attempts to protect a cultural legacy from historical obscurity while critiquing it and endeavouring to look beyond its self-imposed limitations (as Benjamin says, 'every image of the past that is not recognised by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably').² Institutionalization and in-fighting, fashion and backlash, have, according to Rich, 'deprived [feminist film] of its own history, substituting a canon of texts for a set of lived experiences, long since forgotten, shelved or denied by those who went through them'.³ Her account concentrates largely on the internal problems of feminist film culture, suggesting that it must bear some of the responsibility for its own decline; although deeper historical patterns are glimpsed through the palimpsest of Rich's personal history (the political changes of the 1980s, attacks on state funding for the arts, the pro-censorship lobby, and so on). In the 1990s, as Rich observes, feminist film culture has reached an impasse: 'What sprang up in the seventies and was institutionalized in the eighties has been stagnating in the nineties, its vigor bypassed by queer culture, on the one hand, multiculturalism on the other, and cultural studies in general'.⁴

Terms like 'feminist film movement' or 'feminist film culture' elide a number of important distinctions – between theory, criticism, production and other related areas. As anyone who has ever compiled a reading list for a course on women's cinema knows, beyond academia's canon lies a small hinterland of films which have received little or no scholarly or critical attention. Women's cinema, as a consequence, has tended to be configured in the image of feminist theory, at the expense of its actual diversity. The moribundity which Rich perceives in feminist film may in fact be more a feature of feminist writing about film than feminist filmmaking itself. Writing as a critic first and foremost, Rich is forthright in her rejection of psychoanalytic theory, though she may be only partly correct in blaming it for the stagnation of feminist film culture: the negation of feminine subjectivity which characterizes Lacanianism is by no means its exclusive prerogative. Feminist film theory and theoretical criticism have grown through several

1 B. Ruby Rich, *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of the Feminist Film Movement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

2 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in *Illuminations* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 257.

3 Rich, *Chick Flicks*, p. 1.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

5 Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1984). All quotations are from pp. 12–13.

6 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) and *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

7 See Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

8 Chris Straayer, *Deviant Eyes, Deviant Bodies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 159.

9 Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (London: The Women's Press, 1979).

paradigms since the early 1970s, but throughout this period there has been a consistent tendency to prioritize the problematization of the notion of femininity (in the author, the character and the spectator) over engagement with other aspects of women's filmmaking. In the 1970s and 1980s this was done in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of 'lack'. Teresa de Lauretis begins the first chapter of *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* with a quotation from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, telling the story of the city of Zobeide, a city 'built from a dream of a woman', with streets laid out to follow the course of a naked woman who fled and was pursued in the identical dreams of many men. For de Lauretis, Zobeide is a powerful metaphor for the gendered structure of representation: woman is 'both the source of the drive to represent and its ultimate, unattainable goal'. But it could equally well function as a metaphor for feminist film studies itself: for almost fifteen years, under the influence of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, feminists chased male subjectivity through the streets of Zobeide, 'this ugly city, this trap'.⁵ For feminist film scholars studying a cultural form so massively dominated by men, the construction of a theoretical paradigm in which the absence of female subjectivity is a first principle has been more or less a disaster.

The 1990s saw a move out of this deadlock, thanks to the popularization of ideas originating in other fields of study. Queer theory, notions of the performativity of gender⁶ and cyborg appropriations of technology⁷ have enlivened debate around sex, gender and sexuality – but at a price. In detaching gender from sex, culture from nature (though in the most sophisticated versions of these discourses, sex and nature are also discursive constructions), these theorists have all but dispensed with the category 'women'. Chris Straayer, writing on sexual reorientation in film and video, is quite explicit about this: 'I propose that women – whether butch or femme, phallic or Medusan, lesbian or straight, transvestites, masqueraders or unapologetic patients – reverse Freud's "masculinity complex" to enact a "complex masculinity"'.⁸ The internal contradiction constituted by this sentence – its object is 'women', invoked as a politically effective category – signals some of the contradictions inherent in the position (and, I presume, intentionally fostered by it). Those who argue for the end of gender, or the end of binary gender, gesture towards the utopia of feminist science fictions like Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*.⁹ The argument has both the attractions and the pitfalls of utopianism: it provides an empowering myth which, read back into the present, appears to resolve or remove a whole series of theoretical blockages; but in doing so it dismantles the grounds of its own existence as a politics which responds to a need or demand. Without women, how long can feminism be sustained?

Germaine Greer regards the new gender theory almost as a

10 Germaine Greer, *The Whole Woman* (London: Doubleday, 1999), p. 2.

conspiracy: 'Real women are being phased out; the first step, persuading them to deny their own existence, is almost complete'.¹⁰ Conversely, I suspect that in the fashion-prone world of cultural theory, the influence of this new paradigm is already on the wane. Judith Butler's second book on gender performativity, *Bodies That Matter*, refines and revises her ideas, emphasizing that the performance of gender is not a matter of free will and that we are all constrained in ways very similar to the old Althusserian notion of interpellation by ideology. What is effected by the introduction of the notion of performativity is the reconceptualization of gender as a more open field, socially regulated and normalized but liable to change in ways that the Lacanian model, ruled by the monolith of the Symbolic, does not allow. This less radical formulation of the gender-as-performance proposition seems to me to have much more political value than some of the more voluntarist versions in circulation. Ultimately, it is not the theoretical correctness of these positions that worries me so much as a vague unease, a feeling that 'the feminine' has come to designate something profoundly negative, a position no-one really wants to occupy (and certainly not without smart clothes and smarter irony), and from which it is not getting any easier to speak. The 1990s gave rise to a new critical and cultural phenomenon: the forgotten woman.

My unease is increased by an impression that the parallel deconstruction of masculinity has been far less thorough, and far less negative. In film culture as a whole, as opposed to academic or progressive film culture, the 1990s have seen a nostalgic revival of masculinity, in which independent film has been a privileged site. (Rich remarks on this in passing: 'Today, with independent movies taken hostage by Tarantino-obsessed dealmakers, film has become a sport for guys . . .').¹¹ The idea of a crisis in cinematic masculinity was first mooted in the 1980s. Scorsese's *Raging Bull* initiated the debate,¹² but the roots of the crisis could be traced back to World War II and film noir. Also in the 1980s, the commercial film industry was just emerging from its own crisis. For almost two decades, alternative cinema was at the cutting edge of film culture, and it was during this period that feminist cinema emerged, in the varied guises of New American Cinema, agitprop, art film, experimental film and formalist political film. Hollywood's reindustrialization in the 1980s was marked by huge increases in budgets and by the appearance of spectacular blockbusters and visceral, inventive genre movies, often with film school-trained directors, who were – with the notable exception of Kathryn Bigelow – all male. As the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, redefinitions of masculinity in cinema seemed to give way to reinstatements of masculinity. *Reservoir Dogs* (Quentin Tarantino, 1991) initiated a new cycle in US cinema, in which extreme violence, narcissism and misogyny became the stock-in-trade for young filmmakers. Ironically,

11 Rich, *Chick Flicks*, p. 382.

12 Pam Cook, 'Masculinity in crisis?', *Screen*, vol. 23, nos 3–4 (1982), pp. 39–46.

young male cinema might have rescued low and medium budgets as a possibility, at least for first films, but in the process it has redefined independent cinema as an outsider's cinema only in the sense that its values are regressive. The indebtedness of this cinema to cult 'B' movies, Hong Kong action and forgotten films of the 1960s and 1970s is well known, and seems to me crucial. The lack of originality here, in form and content, signals a double accomplishment: cinema has been reinvented, and so has masculinity. As Patricia Mellencamp says of Tarantino:

Cinema is an imaginary and historical place where male fantasies of power and honor and love for other men can be realized at a safe distance. This is voyeurism par excellence, where men watch men, where exhibitionist men are simultaneously objects and subjects of their own desire. In this world, women are no longer necessary.¹³

In the nostalgic romance between movies and masculinity, once again woman occupies the place of lack.

If the masculinist appropriation of images from the past functions as a kind of end-run around obsolescence, might feminists attempt anything comparable? The idea figures in Rich's opening and closing chapters, where she talks about 'jumpstart[ing] a feminist film culture, revitalized and retrofit for nineties use',¹⁴ and cites as directional texts Mary Harron's retro-styled biopic *I Shot Andy Warhol* (1996) and Elisabeth Subrin's video remake *Shulie* (1997). Attractive as this idea is, if Fredric Jameson is correct in reading retro-chic as a symptom of a collective inability to represent our own current experience, the idea of expressing a progressive politics in nostalgic terms is almost certainly self-defeating.¹⁵ Women's cinema offers an alternative possibility, also rooted in a relationship with history, but one which emphasizes historicity rather than confounding chronology. During the 1990s, a number of significant women's films have engaged with historical situations in meticulous, sensuous and rigorous ways. I would list, for example, Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), Moufida Tlatli's *Silences of the Palace* (1994), Marleen Gorris's *Antonia's Line* (1995) and Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady* (1996). Other films, such as Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (1997), construct the present as a moment in transition, foregrounding the historical forces at work in it. Each of these films constructs femininity with a precise attention to its cultural and historical particularities, continuities and disjunctions. Three of them attempt to rehabilitate a notion now entirely unfashionable in feminist cultural theory: the idea of female traditions as generational relays of resistance. None of them reinvents women in the visceral, narcissistic way that popular cinema of the 1990s has reinvented men (although the excellent *Under the Skin* [Carine Adler, 1997] has a kinaesthetic turbulence and an appeal to adolescent psychology which could

13 Patricia Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance: Five Ages of Film Feminism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 82.

14 Rich, *Chick Flicks*, p. 5.

15 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 21.

compare), but each attempts to express what it means to be interpellated as a woman in a particular historical moment, drawing on the resources of cinema for appropriate modalities of narration, relations of the look and mise-en-scene. *Silences of the Palace*, for example, is structured by the gaze of an adolescent girl who silently witnesses the exploitation of the women around her until adulthood makes her an object of the gaze and, potentially, of the same exploitation. The look is not simply gendered, male or female, but historicized: looking relations express the feudal relations of the royal household within the film's central flashback, and market relations in the film's postcolonial present. In *The Apple*, the look of the quasi-documentary camera is intrusive, modern, relentless, like the female social worker who releases the locked-up daughters; and it encounters the ideology of fundamentalism in terms of barriers, locked doors and covered faces. *Antonia's Line* takes its narrative structure from the chronicle or the family saga, emphasizing the survival skills of endurance and alliance rather than the luxuries of interiority and individualism. The film's rural setting is constructed as an amalgam of premodern and modern relations, to which the protofeminism of its characters is adapted. Films like these do not mirror young male cinema's nostalgia for masculinity: rather they offer the pleasures of specificity and of a systematized understanding of femininities. They seem important to me because they emphasize the historical presence of women rather than their theoretical absence, and because they resist dissolution into generalities. Above all, though, because they are able to point to the possibilities for resistance and change without theorizing away the agents and beneficiaries of change, namely, women. Although this selection of films is not offered as representative, it nevertheless poses the possibility that the feminism of women's cinema (or at any rate, women's narrative feature films) differs significantly from film theory's feminism. For whatever reasons – perhaps something as banal as the necessity of staging something before the camera, positing a world of some kind – women's cinema seems more interested in the particular material manifestations of actual femininity than the deconstruction of theoretical femininity (although there are films, for instance some of Chantal Akerman's work, that effect the latter through their insistence on the former).

How will these problems and positions be recast by the new screen media? Perhaps not as much as we expect. Generically and aesthetically, much of the new media seems to strive towards the recreation of the old: the continual improvement in the definition of digital images and the persistence of a narrowly defined concept of entertainment indicate that mainstream cinema remains a very influential model. Even in experimental work, the latest generation of artists working in video and other electronic media repeats as much as it invents. There is more to ally Mona Hatoum's video *Measures*

- 16 Valie Export, interviewed in Roswitha Mueller, *Valie Export: Fragments of the Imagination* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 217.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

of *Distance* (1988) with Chantal Akerman's film *News From Home* (1976) than there is to divide the two texts; and the video art of many young artists now working in the UK recycles many of the methods of structural film in the 1970s. Ontologically, however, the far-reaching implications of the shift from analogue to digital image production have been widely noted. The double-edged potential of digital media for feminism is well illustrated by Valie Export's enthusiastic comments. The basis of Export's performance work and expanded cinema, as well as her short videos and feature films, is a constructionist view of the body: 'the body is the principal sign that allows the power of history and history as construction to become visible and therefore changeable'.¹⁶ Because the body in cyberspace is a sign without a referent, Export speculates, 'maybe the system of cyberspace will succeed in creating dreams that free us from historical traces'.¹⁷

The loss of referentiality seems to imply the loss of historicity, which is potentially liberating, but also quite possibly imprisoning. In the absence of a reality which resists idealization and exceeds complete control, image-making may be entirely taken over by ideology (think of *Lara Croft*). Of course there will be contestation, but the grounds of that contestation will be changed. As Export says about the impossibility of reproducing her early work in cyberspace: 'the interesting clash between the fictional bodies of the ancient painting and the living body of the modern woman will be removed, because the body of the modern woman will naturally be based on the model of the frozen image from history. In other words, history cannot be represented in cyberspace in this way, because this break on the level of representation is no longer visible.'¹⁸ 'The real' has been a difficult category in feminist film theory for a long time: like 'the woman' it has been discredited on political grounds as a name which functions to naturalize ideology, and on philosophical grounds as definitively beyond discourse and therefore effectively non-existent. In women's cinema, however, I would speculate that the real in the sense of the referent, indexically linked by the photographic process to the sign, has played an important role. Think of the faces and bodies of the cast of *Born in Flames* (Lizzie Borden, 1983), the Berlin wall in *Die Berührte/No Mercy, No Future* (Helma Sanders-Brahms, 1981), the height of the camera in *Jeanne Dielman* (Chantal Akerman, 1975): in what comparable ways can historical reality be inscribed in digitally generated or manipulated images?

Of course the new technologies, like the old, tend also to be used to extend our perception of reality: the rise of the camcorder documentary and the appearance of new forms like Mona Hatoum's endoscopic videos of the interior of her body are among the many indications that the evidentiary aspect of recording will continue to be important. But the ways in which images are made and read must

- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 215.

be changed by the possibility of digital manipulation: the image's ties to the imagination will be strengthened, and its referential dimension destabilized. As the dialectic of fantasy and reality occurs in increasingly intense forms, it is my hope that women's media will continue to maintain ways of engaging productively with notions of historical reality, especially the reality of women; and it is my expectation that this will be registered in new ways not yet imaginable for me.

The cyberstar: digital pleasures and the end of the Unconscious

BARBARA CREED

Somewhere towards the end of the much-publicized orgy scene in Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) a group of men in cloaks, accompanied by two naked women, arms linked, stroll in front of the camera. The figures are not 'real': that is, they have been digitally generated on computer. The group of seemingly casual strollers appear 'real', seem to have the same ontological status as all the other figures in the orgy scene; but they do not. These figures were inserted in all US prints of Kubrick's film to block from view an explicit, sexual scene that would have earned the film a restrictive NC-17 rating. They are not flesh-and-blood actors, paid to perform before the camera; they were most likely generated from a whole-body Cyberware scanner purchased from a special effects studio such as the Californian company, Cyberware. Like the silvery, slippery, 'liquid metal' T-1000 robot in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (James Cameron, 1991) or the crowd that fills the dock scene in the opening sequence of *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), the computer-generated figures have no referent in the real world. These are not actors playing a part: rather they are what is known in the industry as 'synthespians', 'cyberstars', or 'vactors' (virtual actors) enacting the parts of extras historically played by real actors.

When film was invented at the turn of the century it was hailed as a spectacular and uniquely modern form of entertainment. It brought together the mechanical and mystical – a new form of technology that created the illusion of living characters whose images flickered magically on the screen before the astonished gaze of the modern subject. The cinema operated on many levels: it could create a

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1 Scott McQuire, *Crossing the Digital Threshold* (Brisbane: Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, 1997), p. 41.

comforting illusion of the real world; a universe which did not obey the laws of time, space or movement; a surreal stream of images that seemed to match the movement of the Unconscious. The technology of camera and celluloid film stock combined with actor and director to create a world which now – at the other end of the century – is about to be transformed by another phase of technological development which should prove equally astonishing. In the future there will still be movies, but no celluloid. If there is one thing that everyone working in the industry agrees upon it is that the cinema of the future will no longer depend on film.¹ The beginning of the twentieth century saw the birth of the mechanical camera; the end of the century appears to be witnessing its death.

Digital technology has already revolutionized the cinema: firstly in relation to new modes of film production such as picture imaging, sound and editing; and secondly in relation to new modes of audience reception brought about by new film forms – the blockbuster, interactive CD-Roms, the digital creation of virtual worlds. Celluloid cinema dramatically altered the relationship of the individual to reality; the computer-generated image is about to change that relationship once again and in equally profound ways. Through special effects (animation, miniaturization) it was once possible to create objects and things which did not exist, but which did have referents in the real world – objects, drawings, clay figures. Now it is possible to create computer-generated objects, things and people that do not have referents in the real world but exist solely in the digital domain of the computer. In other words, film has been freed from its dependence on history and on the physical world. Central to these changes is the possibility of creating a virtual actor, of replacing the film star, the carbon-based actor who from the first decades of the cinema has been synonymous with cinema itself. In the future, living actors may compete with digital images for the major roles in the latest blockbuster or romantic comedy.

At the moment, computer-generated images are used either obviously and dramatically to create astonishing special effects (the T-Rex chase and creature stampede in *Jurassic Park* [Steven Spielberg, 1993]) or are used invisibly to construct particular moments (the digital crowds in the opening sequence of *Titanic*). Although a film, animation aside, has not yet been made with a computer-generated or virtual film star in the main role, this appears to be the future. A digitized film star is a studio's dream: capable of performing any task, continuously available, cost effective – and no scandals, unless, of course, the digital star is given an offscreen life in order to keep alive other areas of the industry such as fan magazines, merchandising and promotions. The possibility of digital stars playing the roles of main characters in feature films may sound like nonsense, but the signs are there.

2 Scott McQuire, 'A conversation on film, acting and multimedia: an interview with Ross Gibson', *Practice: a Journal of Visual, Performing and Media Arts*, no. 3 (1998), p. 14.

3 Lynden Barber, 'The vision splendid', *The Weekend Australian Review*, 25–26 September 1999, pp. 16–19.

4 James Daly (ed.), 'The people who are reinventing entertainment', *Wired*, November 1997, pp. 201–5.

5 David Pescovitz, 'Starmaker', *Wired* (October 1998), p. 153.

In 1987 the Kleiser-Walczak Construction Company commenced the Synthespian Project: its aim was to 'create life-like figures based on the digital animation of clay models'.² It has been possible for some time digitally to paint an actor's face onto another actor's body when the unexpected occurs, such as the death of Brandon Lee during the filming of *The Crow* (Alex Proyas, 1994): a number of scenes were finished in this way. In 1997 George Lucas's company, Industrial Light and Magic, commenced work on constructing a composite virtual actor – a synthespian made up of the bodily parts of different live actors. Prior to the Brandon Lee resurrection, the California Senate drew up what has become known as the 'Astaire' Bill. The widow of Fred Astaire, backed by the Screen Actors' Guild, sought to restrict the use of computer-generated digital images of her husband. Alarmed at the possibility of such restrictions the studios opposed the legislation, which still has to be finalized; but it appears as if it will be legally possible to digitize dead stars in the future.³ Companies such as Virtual Celebrity Productions have already purchased the rights to use images of a number of famous stars, including Marlene Dietrich and Vincent Price. No doubt living stars may, in their lifetime, sell the rights to digitize their images after their retirement and/or death. Arnold's famous threat, 'I'll be back', may take on new meaning.

In 1998, the first posthuman talent agency was established by Ivan Gulas, a clinical psychologist from Harvard, and Michael Rosenblatt, co-founder of the Atlantic Entertainment group. Gulas, a specialist in 'the correlation between human emotions and expression' brought Justine, the Company's first synthespian, to life using software designed 'to recreate human cells for medical imaging'. According to Gulas, they were 'even able to wrinkle skin so it behaves like real tissue'.⁴ Studios are already able to purchase whole-body scanners to create synthespians for crowd and group scenes from Cyberware; and synthespians have already been used in *The Voyage Home: Star Trek IV* (Leonard Nimoy, 1986) and *Titanic*.⁵ Whether or not it will ever be possible to create a synthespian capable of giving a fully convincing, nuanced, intuitive human performance is another matter and one which gives rise to differing opinions. There is no doubt, however, that the presence of cyberstars in films will significantly alter the relationship between the spectator and the image.

Eyes Wide Shut is interesting to consider in this context. Kubrick's film is based on a novel written in 1926 by Arthur Schnitzler called *Traumnovelle*, meaning 'Dream Story'. The title *Eyes Wide Shut* suggests a state of dreaming, of seeing a flow of images with one's eyes shut. The film offers an intriguing blend of the real (an actual and well-known couple playing a fictional couple); the imaginary (the narrative of sexual desire and fantasy) and the hyperreal (computer-generated characters in the orgy scene). Although the

studio was responsible for the digital alterations, the 'invisible' presence of computer-generated actors in a film about a dream world invites us to speculate about the possible effects the presence of virtual stars will have on audiences. If there is a mix of living stars and synthespians, will the presence of the latter affect the way in which the spectator relates to the former? Will audiences relate differently to the synthespian because the digital star is not human but an idealized composite of those traits thought to signify star quality?

In choosing Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, Kubrick was perhaps playing a little with his audience. With their ideal looks, perfect bodies, star qualities, fame, wealth and exotic lifestyles, Cruise and Kidman seem to epitomize the Hollywood dream. It is not difficult to imagine the Cruise–Kidman duo as a perfect combination on which to model a synthespian couple. They are the kind of actors who could well sign a lucrative deal to sell their 'images' as the basis for creating a synthespian duo in the future – whose performances could continue well after the living actors are dead. This would not just involve the rerun of old favourites, as now happens after an actor's death, but films starring dead actors in new digitally created performances. The spectator might well feel engulfed by a sense of the uncanny as she/he watches the dead reanimated. Cruise, in fact, plays a character in *Eyes Wide Shut* who lives on the surface of things, who is in desperate need of a bad dream, a nightmare – an Unconscious, perhaps – to wake him up to the possibilities of the real world. The possibility of the flesh-and-blood actor being replaced by a virtual actor – whether based on a famous dead actor or totally computer-generated – has interesting implications for a number of areas of theoretical concern to Film and Media Studies.

6 James Naremore, *Acting in the Cinema*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 21.

In *Acting in the Cinema*, James Naremore defines acting in its 'simplest form' as 'nothing more than the transposition of everyday behaviour into a theatrical realm'.⁶ It seems that computer-generated actors have already been able to enact successfully 'everyday behaviour' in a relatively convincing manner. Most audiences are blissfully unaware that they have been watching synthespians performing in films such as *The Voyage Home*, *Titanic* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

But could cyberstars act with the emotional intensity necessary to signify a range of feelings, from the most subtle to the most powerful? We are all familiar with the mythical Kuleshov experiment in which the film director intercuts the expressionless face of an actor with different scenes (a coffin, a small child, a bowl of soup) in order to create the illusion that the actor was performing with great emotion when in fact his expression did not change from

one scene to the next. Audiences praised the actor's wonderful ability to express respectively grief, tenderness and hunger. The emotional impact of each scene was created through the editing process and the willingness of the audience to read emotions into the three different scenarios. It seems clear that a virtual actor would perform exceptionally well in a similar experiment. Certainly, it should not be that difficult to replicate the action performances of a blockbuster hero such as Arnold Schwarzenegger. Given that Schwarzenegger has successfully played the role of a cyborg (*The Terminator* [James Cameron, 1984]) without changing his normal acting persona, it should prove relatively easy for a cyberstar to play the action-packed blockbuster roles of a figure such as Schwarzenegger. But could cyberstars give such extraordinary performances that they could elicit total audience identification, capturing an audience and holding it spellbound? At this point in time it is impossible to answer such a question – although some theorists and filmmakers do argue that such a scenario is unfeasible. According to Ross Gibson, 'acting is an extraordinarily holistic, intuitive, improvisational display of intelligence . . . not everyone can be an actor, because not everyone has that type of intelligence which is emotional, intellectual and bodily. Certainly not every digital animatronics operator is going to have that kind of intelligence . . . actorly intelligence is an extraordinary thing. . . . I don't think it's going to happen.'⁷ But what if it were? In her discussion of science fiction, Michele Pierson states that 'one of the most powerful discourses' on the new technologies relates to the possibility that 'this technology might one day produce images that are so realistic it is impossible to distinguish them from objects in the real world'.⁸

Baudrillard would, of course, denounce such a possibility as another instance of the death of reality.⁹ But how important is the question of 'reality' in relation to representation? The power of technology to alter reality has, after all, always been an integral part of the cinematic process. In the coming era of digitized representation the crucial questions have less to do with reality than with communication. The important thing, as Miriam Hansen has argued, is not to deny the aesthetic of the day but to try to understand it and relate it to one's own experience.¹⁰ At the moment postmodern audiences are still fascinated with the digital special effects associated with such blockbusters as *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day* (Roland Emmerich, 1996), *Titanic* and *The Matrix* (The Wachowski Brothers, 1999). Eventually such effects will be taken for granted, just as the appeal of special effects lost their novelty in the early decades of the cinema. However, the presence of the synthespian in film is not meant to be perceived by the audience as a 'special effect' nor to draw attention to itself: the virtual or synthetic origins of the star will have to be rendered invisible by the

7 McQuire, 'A conversation on film, acting and multimedia', p. 8.

8 Michele Pierson, 'CGI effects in Hollywood science-fiction cinema 1989–95: the wonder years', *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), p. 167.

9 Jean Baudrillard, 'The precession of simulacra', in *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 8.

10 Miriam Hansen, interviewed by Laleen Jayamanne and Anne Rutherford, 'The future of cinema studies in the age of global media: aesthetics, spectatorship and public spheres', *UTS Review*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1999), pp. 94–110.

11 McQuire, *Crossing the Digital Threshold*, p. 5.

12 Vivian Sobchack, *Screening Space* (New York: Ungar, 1987), pp. 225–6.

13 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema,' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 18.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

text in order for the character to offer a convincing, believable performance. According to Scott McQuire:

The most noticeable change is that the credibility of CGI is now judged, not against 'reality', but 'camera-reality'. This reflects the extent to which camera based images have been internalised as a standard of true representation.¹¹

But even if the new measure of assessing reality becomes that of the virtual world, the desire for realistic performances will remain a key factor.

One thing upon which all commentators agree is that digital film has a markedly different look from that of celluloid. The flow of computer-generated images has a greater potential to appear seamless. The image itself appears to lack depth; it has a plastic look. A director can touch up a virtual actor's face – remove blemishes, enhance skin colour, accentuate bone structure, deepen eye colour. What difference will it make if the spectator knows that the actor, or composite actor, who appears to be a figure of flesh and blood was 'born' in a virtual world? The cyberstar is not subject to the same experiences as the living star, experiences such as mothering, Oedipal anxiety, hunger, loss, ecstasy, desire, death. The cyberstar has no repressed desires or primal traumas. In short, the synthespian does not have an Unconscious. In her discussion of computer-generated space, Vivian Sobchack argues that virtual space is marked by a new flatness or depthlessness that critics such as Fredric Jameson have argued is endemic to postmodernism.¹² How much of the power attached to the experience of identification is derived from the spectator's awareness – conscious or not – that the star on the screen has undergone experiences common to the human subject? To what extent will the virtual nature of the star's image induce in the spectator a sense of depthlessness in his/her relationship with the figure on the screen?

In her famous essay 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', Laura Mulvey argues that the 'cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking' not just at any human figure but at the glamorous erotic star. 'Stars provide a focus or centre both to screen space and screen story where they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)'.¹³ In particular, Mulvey is interested in the way in which the female star is represented as a 'perfect product': her body 'stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look'.¹⁴ The potential of the new cyberstar – male or female – to be constructed as a 'perfect product' is enormous. Given the iconic qualities that Mulvey notes are associated with the closeup, the spectator may easily surrender to the

hypnotic power of the 'perfect product' on the screen. But the problem of depth – in relation to the image, the origin of the synthespian and the identificatory relationship – remains. Will the spectator experience an excess of pleasure in identifying with the cyberstar, subjecting the image to her/his erotic look, or will the spectator feel removed or distanced from the image on the screen because she/he is aware that the figure is not human, that it is an image which dwells permanently in the imaginary, totally removed from the symbolic order of loss, trauma and death? Knowing that a cyberstar cannot die in the human sense must affect the way in which the spectator responds to her/his appearance, particularly the star's beauty – a quality whose meaning always invokes its opposite, the threat of loss of beauty brought about by ageing and death.

The potential for the cyberstar to epitomize a digitized form of beauty that is flawless will, combined with the seamless nature of the digital image flow, create a clean plastic cinema based on organizational modes of creativity rather than on a play of improvisation and intuition. McQuire states that many 'digital effects in contemporary cinema are concerned, not to create the perfect image, but to reproduce a camera image, so they'll add flaws like edge halation, lens flare, motion blur, even grain. This suggests that our point of reference has changed. It's not the real world, but cinematic representations of the world which have become our ground of comparison.'¹⁵ Even if digital filmmakers add noise or texture to the image, the impression of one-dimensionality may remain. The emphasis on spectacle and narrative tends to render the workings of the Unconscious invisible. This tendency would become even more marked in films featuring cyberstars. If spectators relate to the screen as a site where they can play out their fantasies, it may make a significant difference if the characters onscreen are played by synthespians, actors without an Unconscious.

One of the most potentially interesting sites for employment of cyberstars is the pornographic: not because pornographic texts do not require stars with great acting potential, but because pornography is itself bound up with the question of origins. The aim of the pornographic narrative is to capture and fetishize closeup images of sexual penetration, female expressions of orgasmic pleasure, and images of penile ejaculation. The pornographic text constitutes an excessive representation of the primal scene. The cyberstar is ideally suited to pornography, particularly as the cyberstar will be able to enact with great ease the bodily contortions required in order to display closeup images of the act of penetration: in the new world of computer-generated images, all bodily actions, from the simplest to the most complex, will be produced by the computer. The new world of digital images will give rise to a new primal fantasy of origins in

¹⁵ McQuire, 'A conversation on film, acting and multimedia', p. 13.

which human (desire) and nonhuman (stars) will combine in impossible ways.

If pleasure in looking at the human form is tied to a desire to identify with idealized figures, film stars who are both ordinary and extraordinary, this desire can clearly be met by the new digital screen technology. If the moment of recognition is, as Lacan argues, a moment overlaid with misrecognition (the subject imagines its mirror image to be more perfect than it is itself) then the new digital star would, like the celluloid star, offer an idealized image as basis for identification. Identifying with the glamorous, perfect image on the screen, the spectator would be caught up in a moment of recognition and misrecognition – not between subject and an ego ideal, but between subject and non-subject which, strangely, may also function as an ego ideal. In his discussion of the ‘sublime time of special effects’, Sean Cubitt raises the interesting possibility of special effects generating an image of the ‘impossible real’.¹⁶ Perhaps the new viewing subject will be caught up in an ‘impossible real’ of the identificatory processes.

In this context, the experience of identification would be marked by a sensation of strangeness. The experience of strangeness is based on an alteration, sometimes almost imperceptible, of reality, a reconfiguration designed to create an odd, uncanny effect, one of having one’s ‘eyes wide shut’. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes argues that within every photograph ‘is the advent of myself as other’,¹⁷ and links this other image to ‘the return of the dead’.¹⁸ Asked to identify with a cyberstar, the spectator would be haunted by a sense of uncanny: the image on the screen appears human, and yet is not human. The glamorous other is a phantom, an image without a referent in the real, an exotic chimera, familiar yet strange.

16 Sean Cubitt, ‘Le réel, c’est l’impossible: the sublime time of special effects’, *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 123–30.

17 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Fontana, 1984), p. 12.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

The distinctiveness of digital criticism

SEAN CUBITT

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The core concern of Media Studies today is the material form of mediation. In whichever direction we take our analyses, the distinctiveness of the discipline lies in its attention to the detailed

functioning of textuality. The sociology of communication, the political economy of the media, the philosophy of media aesthetics, are all distinctive subdisciplines of other, older, fields of research. What distinguishes ours is the irreducible materiality of mediation. We can perhaps feel that we are less prone to overgeneralization, mythmaking and simple errors of fact because of that attention; and that we are in a better position to make statements about audiences, institutions, economies, societies, cultures and aesthetics because we have spent long years, both as individuals and as a research community, looking at the minutiae of historical and contemporary media. And yet in the half-acceptance of a view that they in some way effectively dematerialize the older media, we have intellectually betrayed the digital media. Once dematerialized, media can no longer fall into our field or, alternatively, we are confronted with the proposal that we abandon the central object of our studies, the materiality of the text, and remake ourselves in the theoreticist mould with which the US academy in particular greeted the (to it) embarrassingly political discourses of 1970s 'Screen Theory'. As literary theory has pursued the dematerialization of the book, print, paper and inks in the abstraction of the text, so Media Studies faces a choice between dematerializing and rematerializing its object.

The challenge posed by 'new' media criticism is then not simply one of extending and evolving critical principles in an established paradigm. It is a challenge to the fundamentals of the discourse which potentially alters the terms under which it is possible to study and analyze the media, their functioning and their origination. The influential attempts to account for the supposed impact of digital media on postmodern societies among such commentators as Lyotard, Virilio and Baudrillard¹ derive from the early cybernetic paradigms of information science, and in particular the abstract concept of information promulgated by Shannon, Weaver, Wiener and von Neuman.² But as N. Katherine Hayles points out, that conception of information as pattern, order and system was already in crisis during the Macy Conferences on cybernetics which, between 1946 and 1956, translated it from engineering solution to scientific paradigm.³ In the Media Studies context, it is important to understand the developments in information science since the 1940s, not least as its most recent and most compelling variant, the concept of complexity or emergence, at once occupies a central role in digital cinema and computer graphics generally and provides, in the form of artificial life, the latest in apologies for self-regulating capitalism.

Familiarly known as 'chaos theory', the concept of emergence theorizes that in certain complex systems, including planetary weather systems and some chemical reactions, chaotic states can give rise to new, spontaneously generated states of order and stability. Extended by analogy to social and cultural systems, the paradigm of emergence raises specific problems for the problematic of

- 1 Notably Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*, trans. Julie Rose (London: British Film Institute, 1994); and Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Ian Hamilton Grant (London: Sage, 1993).
- 2 A basic bibliography of cyberculture, including full references for material mentioned in this essay, can be found at <http://www.staff.livjm.ac.uk/mccscubi/modules/digitrefs.html>
- 3 N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), especially ch. 3, pp. 50–83.

4 Margaret Morse, *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 21.

5 Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 13.

representation. On the one hand, it is clear that digitally-generated images and sounds have as only one of their possible functions the representation of previously existing objects: the 'virtual' image, in Margaret Morse's definition, is 'meant to shape or invent a world, not to represent it'.⁴ But on the other, as Hayles has it, 'Virtuality is the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns'.⁵ Hayles's definition relies upon information science's conceptualization of the reflexive relations between systems (such as animals or machines), their environments and their observers. The imaging of a fantasy world is not without relation to the unimaged world into which it is born, from which it derives its fantasia, in which it exists both as information and as representation of information, and in which it functions. But in a host of ways, computer technologies throw themselves open to the chaotic emergence of unforeseen order, to accident, chance and the recursive workings of software algorithms over which the designer has only a limited creative power to choose between possible outcomes. It is in this sense that digital devices have acquired the aura of co-creator: authors as well as stars of films like *Toy Story* (John Lasseter, 1997) become, in the limited sense of hybrid human/machine entities, cyborgs.

The question for digital media critics then no longer concerns the figuration of a previously existing world but rather the nature of the communication between human and mechanical authors, and between those cyborg authors and their co-communicators in the audience. In the case of interactive media such as games and some digital artworks, one line of thought sees an extension of users' control over the text. But a now common counter-argument reads the 'audience' from the point of view of the machine, from which position they appear as effectively random number generators, as the host environment to which the authored work responds, and in which it is increasingly empowered to evolve out of the control of both originators and audience. This offers grounds for a far more complex discussion of the relations between media and non-media than that allowed by the relatively simple problematic of representation.

The necessity to construct a field of argumentation concerning the changing terms of the relation between mediation and 'reality' has led a number of research pioneers to attempt to define the digital in terms of its difference from the photomechanical media, especially in the area of photography. The distinction often operates on the intuited gap between the physical and digital manipulation of images, and has proved a valuable tool in understanding the nature of the transition from photomechanical to digital photography. But as a paradigm for future research it leaves much to be desired, since it rests on a conceptualization of the mechanical photograph as normative and the digital as a deviation from that norm. Rather as the classical narrative film threatens to become the universal norm

from which all other forms of cinema derive, the notion of mechanical media as normative must be challenged if digital criticism is to come of age.

This norm-deviation structure of argument extends to studies in hypertextual narration. Since Media Studies has until now quite properly associated itself with entertainment media, it has largely divorced itself from studying the instrumental use of images in the workplace. But the digital media derive only some of their techniques from entertainment media and the associated structures of representation and narration. At least equal weight needs to be given to non-narrative conventions for organizing and transmitting information: cataloguing and accountancy, and such modes of visualization as cartography and graphic display, for example. Each of these modes of structuration, assembly and retrieval is in certain senses realist, more so in many ways than the conventions of novelistic narrative and perspectival drawing. Such structures are certainly nonlinear, but their origins in bookkeeping, bureaucracy and imperialism suggest that they should not be naively construed as simply antinarrative. Since many digital technologies rely on neither narration nor illusion, the digital critic can no longer depend on the presumed dominance of narrative and picturing to orient their evaluations of specific digital works.

Nonetheless, the question of evaluation is a pressing one for digital critics, not least because of the monopoly structure of the underlying industry and the inequalities exacerbated by global networks. Some earlier positions persist. There are still liberal, 'luddite' critics for whom digital culture heralds the death of literate and humane society. Equally, there are still libertarian 'cybertopians' for whom each new device is evidence of ineluctable technological progress. But the more convincing social critics of digital culture develop subtler arguments concerning the cultures of work, politics and community, drawing on existing media sociological paradigms – such as the panopticon – without constructing simple oppositions between, say, private good versus 'surveillant' bad. In my own work, I have argued that the death of privacy should be embraced in order to hasten the corollary death of private property, already deeply threatened by the insecurity of Internet commerce and the incapacity of copyright laws to regulate, practically or morally, the claims of intellectual property rights. On this basis I propose an aesthetic evaluation based on the opportunity afforded by network anonymity to espouse a dialectic of the public and the intimate. Other critics have argued for more explicitly political criteria, inspired by the 'tactical' use of network communications to further the political goals of such groups as peasant insurgents, ecological campaigners and neo-situationists. In both cases, evaluation is grounded in novel modes of socialization enabled by computer-mediated communications.

Critical to the development of any genuinely new media practices and evaluative criteria are understandings gleaned from debates in numerous online forums concerning the nature of the emergent mediascape. For many years, digital critics have depended on corporate histories and exposes and hagiographic journalism for the bones of a history of the digital media. As new scholarship provides a more thorough historical grounding in the history, we can assess repeated claims of innovation, convergence, spiritualism, conspiracy theory, defeatism and utopianism. Just as cinema analysts are no longer satisfied with simply spotting ideologies in films, so digital critics are beginning to analyze more complex interactions involving the defence industries, the universities and the US military in the development of network technologies, and the influence of quite different research scenarios feeding into early networking techniques from Europe and Asia. These histories are to date overwhelmingly US-oriented: an urgent task for digital media studies is the creation of a body of scholarship on the development of hardware, software and webware globally. Once such work is in place, including critical and analytical interpretations of the value structures of specific technologies, it will be far more possible to understand both the specific qualities of audiovisual experience that shape our interactions with the computer and the semantic worlds in which the producers of digital texts operate.

To some extent this is simply a call to extend existing paradigms in Film and Television Studies. But with digital media the qualities of interaction are not solely psychological. Digital media involve us in distinctive text–user relations, involving for example physical interactions with software. Games, word processing, image generation and manipulation, sound editing, 3-D modelling and network packages all demand bodily engagement on the part of the end user. In this sense the ‘text’ of digital media is not a fixed entity but the ephemeral production of users’ interactions with the medium. From one point of view this represents a diminution and dematerialization of textuality: without the permanence of the model text, there is no object for textual analysis. Since the digital interface is by nature fleeting and changeable, textuality resides primarily in the flow of interactions, and only marginally in end products such as digital animations and 3-D models. Digital cinema also demands an understanding of the levels and orders of interactions into which it enters with its audiences. For example, the once peripheral marketing of toys, games and consumer goods associated with the first *Star Wars* film (George Lucas, 1977) is now integral to the production of *Star Wars Episode One: The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999). Not only does the latter film contain clear indications of the computer games and theme park rides that will be developed from it, such spinoffs are also designed at the same time as the film, sharing code with the digital special effects which are constructed specifically

to provide for the swift reuse of animations and models in new products. Even the computer-aided manufacture of *Star Wars* toys now employs the very same 3-D models as the film itself. Effectively, the film and its associated entertainments comprise a single, extended and highly interactive, text.

Extended textuality and ephemerality also raise questions about temporality. The first generation of cybercritics has been concerned largely with the production of (cyber)space: its successors will address the manipulation of cybertime. To a degree, film and television have already pre-empted that revolution in spatial perception commonly attributed to digital media. The specificity of digital media, however, lies in their complex layering of temporalities. Extreme temporal states, for example freezes and crashes, are woven into realtime interactions with the machine, delayed time interactions with 'live' interlocutors, download times, bootup times, downtime and lagtime, refresh rates and the constant balancing of quality against processing time performed by every user of modelling, imaging and sound-editing software. These temporalities are integral to the experience of computing, increasingly enter the myths of our era (notably the myth of instantaneity) and become part of the increasingly sophisticated manipulations of time in other media, especially cinema. Time itself is becoming a raw material for creative production. Simultaneously, the time and quality of users' attention is the commodity most highly valued by Internet advertisers and traders. The time of the click, the nomadic time of the browser, extends the extraneous channel-zapping of the television remote control into an active principle of the medium itself. These new forms of temporality will form an important aspect of new digital criticism.

While there is now a substantial literature on film music, sound continues to receive less attention than the image in cinema criticism.⁶ Digital sound, however, has attracted some substantial attention, notably from Douglas Kahn and the group around *Essays in Sound*.⁷ Typography and graphic design, rarely addressed in film and television criticism, or even in contemporary literary studies, also require attention because they play a major role in all digital media. The ephemeral materiality of fonts, sound cues, hyperlinks and the detailed peculiarities of games, software and network product need to be addressed, both theoretically and practically. If Media Studies cannot demonstrate familiarity with at least the basic terminology of software culture, how are we to persuade an increasingly computer-literate public that we have anything valuable to say?

A central claim of cybercultural discourse is that computer-mediated communication promotes democratization. One of the things Media Studies should offer to this democratization of the media is the publicizing of alternative cultural practices. Rather than decry the limited aesthetic ambition of amateur culture, might we not be better

6 The major exceptions are in the work of Michel Chion and of Rick Altman and his associates. See, notably, Michel Chion, *Le Son au cinéma* (nouvelle édition) (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, Collection Essais, 1992); and Rick Altman (ed.), *Sound Theory/Sound Practice* (London: Routledge, 1992).

7 See, for example, Douglas Kahn, *Noise Water Meat: a History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); and John Potts, 'Schizochronia: time in digital sound', in *Essays in Sound* 2, (Sydney: Contemporary Sound Arts, 1995), np.

employed liaising between amateur and artistic zones? Over the last ten years, the digital media arts have become especially fruitful areas for the development of political aesthetics. For example, numbers of media artists have developed online and gallery installations whose social and sociable interfaces provide alternatives to the competitive individualism of the standard desktop workstation. The width and variety of digital art practice is immense, its challenges to the commodification of the 'white cube' of modernist gallery and museum culture profound, and the networks for professional communication highly developed. What is lacking is a critical discourse open to the general public, especially to those who build their own websites or synthetic landscapes as hobbyists, but who crave broader vistas and more challenging ideas.

In the meticulous reading of digital media, especially of amateur, tactical and art media, media studies stands to gain not only an understanding of the 'new' media, not only a definition of older disciplinary precepts, and not only a serious rethinking of some major principles of Media Studies; for entirely new avenues of analysis are rendered thinkable by media innovation. The challenge at the turn of the millennium is to develop an appropriate, specific and material vocabulary for digital criticism.

Cultural difference and exchange: a future for European film

DIMITRIS ELEFThERIOtIS

In the last ten years questions of national identity have become particularly important in the European context. Not only has the very concept of national identity become the object of political and critical scrutiny, but also nation states and pan-European organizations are faced with the urgent need to identify those unifying aspects of Europe that can possibly constitute a shared European identity while at the same time allowing for the diversity of identities encountered within the geopolitical space of Europe and European nations. There are all the signs that this will become even more urgent in the coming decades as processes of unification and expansion of the European Union intensify and nationalist movements emerge in the political arena of Eastern and Western Europe. The crucial

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contradiction articulated on the level of both the nation state and pan-European organizations is between the liberal demand to recognize and celebrate diversity and the essentialist need to hold on to an imaginary centre, the 'shared' experience of historical processes and the consensual acceptance of 'common' moral, political and cultural values. This conflict is a cause of considerable anxiety in regional, national and international governing bodies and is omnipresent in the cultural policies pursued by both the European Union and the Council of Europe.

At the same time national cinemas are experiencing a profound crisis which makes the role of pan-European funding and policy-making bodies crucial for their survival into the new millennium. This crisis is evident on many levels, from the critical-theoretical to the economic. Indeed the very term 'national cinema' is riddled with conceptual contradictions, and its theoretical, pedagogic and practical usefulness has been repeatedly challenged in recent years.¹ But perhaps more relevant is the realization that shrinking domestic markets have become in most cases inadequate for the financial survival of national films. As a result more and more filmmakers have to rely on state or European funding (and in many cases both) for their productions. This in turn brings into play the contradictions in national and European policy discussed above and raises dilemmas of criteria and priorities: for example, is funding offered to films asserting difference or to those relying on an assumed shared repertory of 'European' themes and values? The current policy of supporting both (albeit in varying degrees) might require future revision in the face of changing political priorities and market concerns. Coproduction is emerging as an important strategy for the survival of European cinema. Notwithstanding the negative criticism it attracts, coproduction has, since the 1920s, facilitated the making of countless films belonging to both the commercial/popular and the art canons. The recent significant shift towards coproduction represents, nevertheless, a qualitative leap as the norm will almost certainly become (if it is not already) transnational rather than national production.² This is further reinforced by the prominent position that transnational co-operation plays in the funding criteria of the various initiatives of the MEDIA I and MEDIA II programmes of the European Union, and forms the basis of the European Council's influential fund EURIMAGES.

What is further emphasized by the funding criteria of such organizations is the ability of films to cross cultural and national borders across Europe. This is seen as essential not only because it provides a broader market for films but also because it accelerates the process of European cultural unification. Clearly there is a convergence between European film policy, the strategies of the industry and the reality of the market. In the new millennium the challenge that confronts directors, writers and producers, as well as

1 For example, Andrew Higson, 'The concept of national cinema', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 4 (1989); Stephen Crofts, 'Reconceptualising national cinema/s', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 14, no. 3 (1993).

2 Angus Finney, in *The State of European Cinema: a New Dose of Reality* (London: Cassell, 1996), notes that the percentage of European coproduced films rose from 12% in 1987 to 37% in 1993.

national and transnational policy makers, is the financial survival of European cinema through the establishment and development of transnational partnerships and the production of films that can effectively cross cultural and national borders.

It is important, then, to evaluate some of the strategies employed by filmmakers in their attempts to make films that can 'travel'. In a sense, some of the dilemmas facing European cinema(s) are structurally similar to those clustering around national and European identity: how to discover 'unity' ('shared' audiences and/or values) while respecting and encouraging diversity. Of particular interest is the increasing engagement of European films with precisely the issues of identity, similarity and difference, and cultural exchange. Questions of cultural difference and ways of overcoming it through/in cultural exchange have become crucially overdetermined in contemporary Europe and European cinema. While it is, in this context, logical and expected for films to explore themes of difference it might seem paradoxical that these concerns are also seen as a tactical weapon in attempts to attract transnational critical attention and, crucially, audiences. I shall examine textual strategies for representing difference in three recent European films: *Mediterraneo* (Gabriele Salvatores, Italy, 1991), *Bhaji on the Beach* (Gurinder Chadha, UK, 1993) and *Underground* (Emir Kusturica, France/Germany/Hungary, 1995). Each of these has successfully crossed national borders; and I shall argue that they offer two alternative strategies for 'coping' with difference, strategies which not only 'prescribe' alternative futures for a transnational European cinema but also provide invaluable insights into conceptualizations of cultural difference and exchange within Europe.

I shall briefly address some key theoretical issues around identity, similarity and difference, taking Homi Bhabha's crucial distinction between cultural diversity and difference as my point of departure. Bhabha calls for a revision of the methodology and history of critical theory, which, he suggests, can only happen under the guidance of cultural difference and not cultural diversity:

Cultural diversity is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as 'knowledgeable', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. . . . Cultural diversity is the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs; held in a time-frame of relativism it gives rise to liberal notions of multiculturalism, cultural exchange or the culture of humanity. Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity.³

3 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 34.

What is ironic about liberal celebrations of cultural diversity or even radical forms of cultural relativism is the fact that such recognitions of the 'value' of the various cultures perceive them in isolation from each other; in the 'totalized' existence that Bhabha describes cultures exist beyond politics and beyond interaction. Difference, on the other hand, must be understood as political, positional and essentially fluid. The positional character of difference reintroduces the possibility of similarity, the possibility for a cultural product to reach out beyond the borders of its cultural (usually national) context to texts and constituencies placed in similarly marginal positions. As my analysis of the films will demonstrate, Bhabha's diversity/difference binary offers a useful conceptual framework for the mapping of representations of cultural difference in European cinema.

It is important to conceptualize difference not as the assertion of unbridgeable epistemological and cultural chasms, but as what initiates complex but knowable relations of exchange and interaction. As Bhabha notes:

The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in the 'war of position', marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification. Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always '*incomplete*' or *open to cultural translation*.⁴

4 Ibid., pp. 162–3 (emphasis mine).

Similarity and difference exist in a dialectic and dynamic relationship of mutual interdependence rather than of exclusion. Because difference is positional and political, the fact that the sites of cultural production, circulation and consumption are specific and unique does not preclude structural similarities between positionalities and political contestations. Instead of imposing universal similarities or unbridgeable differences, filmmakers such as Gurinder Chadha and Emir Kusturica are involved in exploring the dialectics of similarity and difference and make this the basis for cultural border-crossing and exchange.

Mediterraneo is the story of eight misfit Italian soldiers who in 1941 are sent to occupy the remote Greek island of Meghisti. As they become increasingly isolated from the rest of the world, they find pleasure in escaping the war and their national identity, eventually becoming 'one' with the natives. The central theme of the film is precisely this erasure of national identity as the sea and the sun of the Aegean island wash out any traces of cultural or physical difference. In the first twenty minutes of the film, Meghisti seems to be empty of people, with the soldiers involved in comic incidents that betray their apprehension of the (absent) natives and establish

their manifest incompetence to act as an occupying force. Their fear and incompetence lead to a series of self-destructive actions (such as smashing their radio and shooting the mule) which effectively cut them off from the rest of the Italian army and the war. They eventually lose all traces of their military status, including uniforms and weapons.

Their first encounter with the locals occurs when the sentry is awakened by a group of Greek children who tease him. As panic takes over the soldiers march in deadly silence and fully armed through the paths and the squares of the village looking for the enemy. They approach a washing line, with bright white sheets obscuring the view, and on parting them they discover the locals (children, women and old men) sitting in a cafe drinking ouzo and playing backgammon. When they inquire where the men are, they are directed to the local priest who not only speaks perfect Italian but also reassures them that 'Greeks, Italians, same face, same race'. With the issue of difference settled like that, the film sets out to explore such universal issues as friendship, love, destiny and the meaning of life.

On the level of narrative the sequence functions as a reassurance for the invading but fearful soldiers that the invaded are not the hostile and dangerous 'other' that a war enemy essentially is. On the level of the mise-en-scene, the disavowal of threatening difference takes the form of postcard-type shots of the villagers engaged in their peaceful and stereotypically Greek activities. This is further reinforced by the vaguely Greek-sounding music that dominates the soundtrack. Reassurance here takes the form of a representation of the natives as a group of primitive, fun-loving, simple and friendly people who only come to life under the gaze of the Italian soldiers. The Greek villagers become an organic part of the wild but beautiful landscape that exists beyond history or conflict. The threatening but historically rooted difference of the enemy is replaced by a much more controlled difference, that of the objectified native abstracted from historical reality and re-packaged as local colour. In this sense the historically specific becomes eternal and the encounter of the two cultures an existential issue.

In *Bhaji on the Beach* the sequence of the arrival of the group of British Asian women in Blackpool is structurally and thematically very similar to the one discussed above, but represents the encounter with the resort in a drastically different way. The women initially become a spectacle both for the residents of Blackpool and for the camera as they parade in front of both. Particularly interesting is the shot in which they enter the frame facing the camera and looking out of frame as Rekha exclaims 'Bombay!'. The shot that follows appears to be their point of view as we see what Rekha described as Bombay and is in reality Blackpool with its illuminations: a crowded street, bustling with noise, with colourful ornaments dominating the

view. As the camera tilts down, however, we rediscover the group, part of the colourful and noisy crowd, distinct but not out of place. Unlike the encounter between Greeks and Italians in *Mediterraneo* this sequence articulates the difference of the group as positional and relative, with the confusion of the point of view problematizing any division of the world into two fields. This not only involves the playful rejection of the shot/reverse-shot pattern (which is essentially a division of narrative space in two worlds occupied by different characters and invested with different representational values) but also the systematic undermining of any position which supports an 'us/them' dichotomy.

But this does not mean that difference is negated or that cultural exchange unfolds outside a field of complex power relations. This is brilliantly illustrated in the case of Asha's holiday romance with Ambrose. In a fantasy staged in a Blackpool park and pastiching the musical numbers of Hindi melodramas, a romantic chase is choreographed with Asha and Ambrose dressed and made up as glamorous Indian stars. The point-of-view system is again peculiar. While this is clearly Asha's fantasy, the cinematic enunciation is that of a third person omniscient narrative with the camera revealing that the object of the fantasy, the glamorous Indian man, is really Ambrose. The narrative and cinematic points of view align at the very end as Asha looks at Ambrose's pale face marked by smudged brown makeup. This last shot functions as the ultimate sign of the impossibility of their romance. Ambrose has no place in the culturally specific mise-en-scene of Asha's fantasy. Particularly alarming is the fact that in this shot cultural difference is constructed in racial terms: Ambrose is the wrong colour, the running makeup reveals his 'Indianness' to be false. The fantasy is very ambivalent: it can be seen as Asha's resistance to Ambrose's orientalist attitude, but it also places her within a racist discourse that disavows her romance and negates the possibility of cultural interaction. Furthermore, the point-of-view system undermines her desire and authority as her perception of Ambrose's 'fakeness' is revealed to be based on a mistake: it is not Ambrose who is getting drenched but her. In a sense, the fantasy is not about Ambrose at all, but expresses Asha's inability to perceive her identity and her difference in ways that escape a fixed position in terms of race and gender. The film rigorously resists representations of difference as otherness while at the same time engaging in a thorough exploration of positions and power structures articulated around difference.

This is also the case with *Underground*, which attracted hostile criticism for not offering a definitive position in relation to the history of the former Yugoslavia and the role of the nationalist movements. History in the film consists of newsreel footage of recognizable events, *Forrest Gump*-like manipulations of this footage,

a constructed propagandistic national history, and the story of the characters. In a tenuous and iconoclastic way, a link is created between 'objective' history, constructed national mythology and the film's narrative. The film is not preoccupied with historical accuracy but is deeply historical: not just because the adventures of the heroes only make sense against a historical background, but also because history is itself the subject matter of the film. There is a shrewd awareness of the political stakes and the power structures involved in producing and circulating a national history. The ground/underground divide is a clear representation of this power structure: the imposition of a national history from above has direct and tragic effects on the lives of those below. But although the film seems to criticize this manipulation it does not suggest an unproblematic true/false dichotomy. In true Foucauldian fashion, *Underground* is concerned more with the effects that official national truth has on individuals and less on its historical accuracy.

The final sequence of the film, in which the characters emerge from the waters of the Danube to a utopian land beyond historical reality and power structures, is a celebration of communality with national unity and peace restored. While this is marked as fantasy, it contains aspects of the reality of the film: mannerisms, antagonisms, humour, references to narrative events, music. It is a utopia, a non-place which is both real and imagined, both culturally specific and transculturally recognizable. The symbolic 'birth of a nation', with cattle emerging from the water to form a homeland, is also a death or rather a double death, the negation of a negation. This is expressed in terms of an overcoming of loss that works on several levels. The loss of unity of the 'country', the loss of friendship and goodwill, the loss of physical and psychological capabilities, the loss involved in ageing and death are all negated as the full cast of the film celebrate their reunion in an outdoor wedding party. The sequence not only exemplifies Benedict Anderson's notion of the imagined community as both sovereign and limited, real and imagined,⁵ but also demonstrates the fundamental dialectic between similarity and difference that informs national identity. The assertion of difference (the specificity of the nation, in this case the 'fairytale country Yugoslavia') is articulated in forms, processes and rituals which are transculturally similar.

The longing for a lost unity and the imagining of a happy and peaceful community is what forms the basis of all nationalist sensibilities. Ivan's direct address to camera is emotionally charged as he overcomes his speech impediment and articulates the simple and transcultural fantasy of individual and national harmony. The film's conclusion, with a piece of land separating from the mainland and drifting away to an uncertain destination and future, rearticulates the dynamic dialectic of similarity and difference. The imagined

5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 5–7.

union (articulated verbally, visually and symbolically in Ivan's monologue and the wedding party, and celebrated by the music) is undermined by this splitting and drifting which reintroduces the harsh reality of the painful and horrific dismemberment of the country. The film places the utopia of the recovery of the 'lost country of the fairytale' in the context of both the universal modality of nationalism and the specific historical reality of Yugoslavia. This is in remarkable contrast to the role of utopia and history in *Mediterraneo*, where the cultural (and clearly utopian) unity of Greeks and Italians can only happen once the historical reality of the war is safely removed from the narrative of the film.

Conflicts around national and European identity, the representational regimes of the films under consideration, and future strategies for a transcultural and transnational European cinema can be mapped around Bhabha's diversity/difference dichotomy. The demand for, and celebration of, cultural diversity can be seen as essentially European in terms of the assertion of values such as the democratic pluralism of culture and the freedom and autonomy of artistic expressions. In liberal cultural relativism and multiculturalism, Europe discovers its enlightened uniqueness as well as a point of coherence in its fractured identity. *Mediterraneo* mobilizes these sensibilities by negating the specific historic context that defines the difference(s) between cultures in conflict. The erasure of difference enables the film to capitalize on the assumed universality of its themes – the film is 'dedicated to all those who are running away'. If *Mediterraneo* offers the comfortable 'perspective' of the diversity of cultures, *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Underground* challenge the very possibility of such positions. As my analysis demonstrates, the point-of-view system in *Bhaji* is emblematic of the complexity of positions and the impossibility of reducing difference into simple binaries. Similarly, *Underground* rejects any unproblematic view of Yugoslavian history and nationalism.

Crucially, in all three films water plays an important role: the sea that surrounds the island and gives the name to the film in *Mediterraneo*, the seaside resort of Blackpool, and the water that initiates and dispels Asha's fantasies in *Bhaji on the Beach*; the water that splits the wedding party from the mainland and symbolizes death and re-birth in *Underground*. Water is a material and visual manifestation of fluidity, and in all three films fluidity involves first and foremost a renegotiation of identity. This entails a restructuring of the relationship between similarity and difference that supports any identity. In each of the films, too, water has specific narrative and symbolic functions which represent distinctive ways in which cultural difference and exchange are conceived and constructed. Furthermore, in a geographical sense

water seems to reproduce this dynamic relationship between similarity and difference, union and separation: seas and rivers are not only physical frontiers and markers of national borders, but also routes of communication linking and connecting ports, peoples and cultures.

In *Mediterraneo* the cultural and historical difference between the Italian soldiers and the Greek natives is erased as the sea disconnects them from the flow of history and the fixity of national identity. But, as the 'first encounter' sequence demonstrates, this assertion of similarity, of the essential sameness of the human condition, negates difference by placing it within a discourse and a regime of representation that can only divide the world in 'us' and 'them', the same and the other. The function of the sea, then, despite the rhetoric and tone of sameness, is to separate, to protect the island from history, reality and interaction, to turn it into a 'desert island' where cultures exist in the totalizing loneliness of the 'utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity', that Bhabha describes.

Bhaji on the Beach and *Underground* involve a far more dynamic approach: while cultural difference is acknowledged, it is placed in concrete historical and geographical contexts and with reference to a higher level of discourse that introduces similarity in difference. *Bhaji on the Beach* articulates difference as positional and political, stresses interconnectedness, and perceives cultural exchange as a complex relationship fully structured by both power relations and individual agency. *Underground* dramatizes the conflict between official versions of national history and identity on the one hand and individual experiences of history and the nation on the other. The film refers to contradictions in the formation of national identity which are not restricted to Yugoslavia. This seems to explain the critical controversy surrounding *Underground*: the film represents nationalism as a celebration of communality and unity and as politically oppressive and divisive. The complexity of this relationship not only underpins the formation of most national identities but also avoids representing Serbian nationalism as 'other'. The film does not divide the world into 'us' and 'them' – a division very much demanded by the new world order, and one that can offer a political position from which to make moral sense of history and administer the necessary punishment. *Mediterraneo* views the sea as disconnecting and dividing, while *Bhaji on the Beach* and *Underground* preserve the fundamental dialectic of separation and unity, of similarity and difference.

If cultural gaps are to be bridged and cultural frontiers to be effectively crossed in the production, circulation and consumption of European films, difference must be neither negated in the name of the universality of culture nor affirmed in the fortresses of national and cultural particularity. Like those travellers who for millennia

have crossed the Mediterranean and sailed the Danube, we need to discover what brings us together by exploring what constitutes our difference.

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CATHERINE GRANT

Some of the most widespread, and resistant, classificatory practices in contemporary audiovisual production, distribution, reception and academic study are founded on the discourses of auteurism. These practices continue to base themselves on the multifaceted belief that films, though usually produced collectively, are most likely to be *valuable* when they are more or less conspicuously the product of their directors. Despite the apparent ubiquity of auteurism, I will subject it here to some millennial speculation. Will the figure of the film director as currently inscribed in the practices and discourses of auteurism continue to thrive in cinema's second full century of existence? And how might auteurism continue to adapt itself to the processes of 'globalization', namely the apparent 'deterritorialization' of some forms of cultural production and the elaboration of new transnational systems of distribution with the accompanying fragmentation of mass markets and the targeting of particular audience segments? As well as exploring this, I hope to suggest some ways in which Screen Studies might in future take up these debates, in part through the revival and amplification of a commercial take on auteurism. In so doing I am following in the footsteps of a number of earlier contributors to *Screen*.¹ It is, nonetheless, worth treading in these footsteps with care, for despite the continual academic attention accorded to film directors during the last four decades, film authorship has rarely been considered a wholly legitimate object of contemplation. Many of those examining it have confessed to fears that they were resurrecting essentialist critical concepts and practices that ought to remain dead and buried. Despite this habitual queasiness, I would argue that it is especially difficult now to disavow the effect, on both film culture *and* Screen Studies, of the increasingly reificatory and commodifying processes of contemporary auteurism.

Given that part of what I shall discuss is the potential 'deterritorializing' of auteurism, it is useful to remind ourselves how

1 Ben Brewster, 'Brecht and the film industry', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 4 (1975–6), pp. 16–33; Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, 'On authorship', *Screen*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1979), pp. 35–61; Michel Foucault, 'What is an author?', *Screen*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1979), pp. 13–33; Paul Kerr, 'My name is Joseph Lewis', *Screen*, vol. 24, nos 4–5 (1983), pp. 48–66; Vincent Porter, 'Film copyright: film culture', *Screen*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1978), pp. 90–108.

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2 Steve Neale, 'Art cinema as institution', *Screen*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1981), pp. 11–39, 33.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 36.

4 John Caughie (ed.), *Theories of Authorship* (London: British Film Institute, 1981), p. 15.

5 Rosanna Maule, 'De-authorizing the auteur: postmodern politics of interpellation in contemporary European cinema', in Cristina Degli-Esposti (ed.), *Postmodernism in the Cinema* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), pp. 113–30, 119.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 117.

7 Timothy Corrigan, 'The commerce of auteurism', in *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 101–36, 104.

these practices and discourses emerged. In his 1981 *Screen* article 'Art cinema as institution', Steve Neale posited that the postwar European attribution of special artistic significance to film directors or auteurs helped to stabilize the categorization of art cinema's highly eclectic output in a way that the typology of shortlived 'movements' – Expressionism, Poetic Realism, Neorealism and the New Wave – had failed to achieve.² This stabilization, along with a strong assertion of qualitative difference from the genre-based output of Hollywood, paved the way for the shoring up of art cinema as an institutional space, enabling the national cinemas of Europe to try to counter the American domination of their domestic market. For Neale, the name of the author came in the postwar period to 'function as a "brand name", a means of labelling and selling a film and of orienting expectations and channelling meaning and pleasure in the absence of generic boundaries and categories'.³ Although Neale argued strongly for the displacement of auteurism as both filmmaking practice and heuristic category, he did not outline the way in which this might come about. Writing in the same year, John Caughie was more cautious, pointing to the resistant qualities of both concept and practice, and noting that '[t]he attempt to move beyond *auteurism* has to recognize also the fascination of the figure of the *auteur*, and the way he is used in the cinephile's pleasure'.⁴

While both Neale's and Caughie's work began to register a shift in the postwar period from a modernist conceptualization of authorship as the exertion of self-expressive artistic control towards what could be described as a 'postmodernist author-function', where the appropriative strategies, competences and pleasures of audiences appear, at the very least, equally important, neither writer explored this idea. While some recent accounts of auteurism have also nodded in the direction of the audience in 'the commercial enhancement of authorship', to use Rosanna Maule's memorable phrase, all seem content to continue, as Maule herself does in a recent essay, in the longstanding auteurist tradition of examining authorial enunciation in the film texts they examine.⁵ More attentive than most to the commercial contexts of contemporary cinema, Maule writes of auteurism's 'authoritative role as enunciative presence, interpellating an "expert" audience prefigured in multimedial and global reception practices'.⁶ Yet, even if one were to agree that auteurism is perceptible precisely as an enunciative presence in the film text in quite the way Maule discusses it in her article, she leaves to one side the fascinating question of exactly how the multimedial and global audience is 'prefigured' for auteurism.

This is where Timothy Corrigan's 1991 essay 'The commerce of auteurism' makes its impact. Corrigan's aim was to investigate the growing importance of auteurism from the 1970s to 1990 – for him, a 'period when the play of commerce . . . increasingly assimilated the action of enunciation and expression'.⁷ He analyzes auteurism 'as a

8 Ibid., p. 103.

9 Meaghan Morris, 'Tooth and claw: tales of survival and *Crocodile Dundee*', in Andrew Ross (ed.), *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1988), pp. 105–27, 122–3.

10 Corrigan, 'The commerce of auteurism', pp. 119, 104.

11 Ibid., pp. 108–9.

12 Ibid., p. 106.

13 Ibid., p. 136.

14 Ibid., p. 2.

15 Ibid., p. 5.

commercial strategy for organizing audience reception, as a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing aims that identify and address the potential cult status of an auteur'.⁸ For Corrigan, auteurism had come to constitute a form of film 'consumption' which *did not have to involve the viewing of a film*. This tautology was possible because, as Meaghan Morris writes, 'the primary modes of film and *auteur* packaging are advertising, review snippeting, trailers, magazine profiles – always already in appropriation as the precondition, and not the postproduction of meaning'.⁹ Following Morris, Corrigan could thus speak of the 'commercial dislocation' of 'putative creative presences' from the authority of the individual film text, and of auteurism as a cultural and commercial *intersubjectivity*.¹⁰ To this end, Corrigan analyzes not films but promotional interviews with three directors (Coppola, Kluge, Ruiz). For him, the interview 'is where the auteur, in addressing cults of fans and critical viewers, can engage and disperse his or her own organising agency as auteur . . . writing and explaining . . . a film through the promotion of a certain intentional self [with] the commercial dramatization of self as the motivating agent of textuality'.¹¹ Auteur status was now chiefly a commercial status; promotional technology and production feats had become 'the new "camera-style"' [sic].¹² For viewers, Corrigan wrote, 'this should mean the pleasure of engaging and adopting one more text that surrounds a movie without the pretenses of its traditional authorities and mystifications'.¹³

This view then, despite its slight voluntaristic tendencies, occasional 'Romanticizing' of auteurist interventions and downplaying of structural and material constraints, embodies a radical shift in critical evaluations of the 'problem' posed by auteurism. Corrigan's conceptualization of contemporary auteurism as fundamentally an *intersubjective* process, together with his desire to examine elements of film culture beyond the auteurist film text itself are, in my view, highly original and very welcome developments for Screen Studies, and I shall return to these later.

Corrigan entitles the collection of essays which includes 'The commerce of auteurism' *A Cinema Without Walls*. This refers not to the lack of material and structural constraints on film production and distribution but instead to the modern dispersal of audiences and the consequent 'disappearance of a clear and stable viewer'.¹⁴ But, writing before the cultural 'globalization' debate really took off, he also uses this metaphor to convey a sense of the geography of contemporary film culture where 'a cinema without walls refers also to the walls of cultural nationalism within an international landscape'.¹⁵ His field of reference is the relatively privileged domain of US and Western European cinema. If we broaden this scope in a brief examination of the contemporary state of other auteurist film cultures, what further 'walls' might we find still in existence?

16 Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, 'Towards a Third Cinema: notes and experiences for the development of a cinema of liberation in the Third World', reprinted in Michael T. Martin (ed.), *The New Latin-American Cinema* Volume I, (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 1997), pp. 33–58.

17 Julianne Burton, 'Film artisans and film industries in Latin America, 1956–1980: theoretical and critical implications of variations in modes of filmic production and consumption', in Martin (ed.), *The New Latin-American Cinema* Volume I, pp. 157–84, 167.

I have already referred to Neale's account of how auteurism was one of the principal means by which the postwar cinemas of Europe posited, organized and then marketed the aesthetic distinctiveness of their film productions. Many national cinemas beyond Europe also engaged themselves in the same processes. My own research is primarily on the cinemas of Latin America; and a thumbnail sketch of this very postwar struggle for the survival of domestic cinema production in that continent was given by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their 1969 article 'Towards a Third Cinema'.¹⁶ Solanas and Getino assigned the typology of 'First Cinema' to the colonizing model of filmmaking and distribution imposed by the US film industry; 'Second Cinema' to the indigenous forms of auteur cinema, the first serious alternative to the postwar hegemony of Hollywood but one which was quickly co-opted by a neocolonial capitalist system; while 'Third Cinema' was their formulation for films, including their own, that set out deliberately to fight the system, made under particular conditions of collective 'authorship' and distributed largely through noncommercial, especially underground, networks. Even the films made in the late 1960s and early 1970s under Third Cinema and similar banners have long since been swallowed up by much the same system as that which co-opted the auteurist Second Cinema. As Julianne Burton noted as early as 1981, with their moment of immediate praxis past, these films 'cease to be a process in order to (appear to) become simply a product . . . a reproducible and hence immutable commodity'.¹⁷ The cultural capital of certain radical pieces of filmmaking, especially those whose 'auteurs' are still around to promote them, is, if anything, increasing further with the passage of time. For example, Patricio Guzmán's astonishing three-part documentary *La batalla de Chile/The Battle of Chile* (1973–6), which he made as part of the Equipo Tercer Año film collective and which received worldwide distribution via the late 1970s solidarity campaign circuits, was literally revisited by him in his latest film *Chile: la memoria obstinada/Chile: Obstinate Memory*. This film and Part II of *La batalla* were both given a limited international release in 1998 to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the coup against Salvador Allende. While neither film was remotely 'commercial' in any conventional sense, Guzmán's participation on the 'fringes' of auteurist commerce at that time, as an 'individual' director engaging in many press interviews and in numerous personal appearances at international commercial as well as non-commercial screenings, undoubtedly enhanced his continuing ability to make films and to have 'his' existing films broadcast to television audiences around the world.

In the 1980s and 1990s, in the wake of political instability, hyperinflation and the usual iniquities of the international currency market, the budgets for 'high production value' feature filmmaking in

Latin America rose to amounts beyond those which could routinely be recouped by domestic cinema distribution alone. The inexorable advance of globalization has consequently altered the scope for 'cultural nationalism' of the earlier forms of Latin-American auteurism. Those very few established Latin-American filmmakers with international 'name-recognition' (Solanas, Arturo Ripstein, María Novaro, Walter Salles, the late María Luisa Bemberg and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, Fernando Birri, Adolfo Aristarain and Eliseo Subiela – these last three principally in Spanish-speaking territories) have financed their filmmaking from the mid 1980s onwards by working in tandem with producers and distributors who have ceaselessly capitalized on those names. They have collaborated fully with contemporary commercial-auteurist practices, fronting the marketing of their movies, allowing themselves repeatedly to be interviewed and profiled in the international media, and thus securing coproduction and other international funding tied to television and video distribution deals, in addition to any available state patronage. Other Latin-American filmmakers, who have not made an international name for themselves yet, also use any cultural and symbolic capital available to them as they accustom themselves to the vagaries and, occasionally, the contradictory demands of the contemporary globalized 'Popular Art Film' market. This means adopting the tactical 'auras' of novelty, topicality, personality and above all distinctiveness, in order to achieve the desired recognition both for their names and for those of their films. At the moment, there are a few low-budget stirrings of a non-auteurist but culturally nationalist popular cinema in the continent – for example, in the aftermath of the unexpected runaway success in Argentina in 1998 of *Pizza, birra, fasalPizza, Beer, Smoke*, a cult youth film directed by Bruno Stagnaro and Israel Adrián Caetano. But it is likely that even this limited success will see its directors increasingly co-opted by the commerce of auteurism as they seek worldwide distribution and finance for future projects – which they are currently doing, having taken their film on the international festival circuit.

It is clear from this brief survey of Latin-American production that while no iniquitous 'walls' have recently come tumbling down in the 'globalized' film market, the spaces created by auteurism, while changing, are not about to disappear, even from film industries and markets which have had a particularly difficult time in the last twenty years. Despite the rush in certain Cultural Studies quarters to embrace the inevitability of 'deterritorialization' under globalization, auteurism still appears to be playing a rather similar role within regional frameworks, or 'territories' (to use the industry term) as it has since the 1950s and 1960s. What has changed is the precise nature and direction of a significant part of the flow of cultural and, especially, economic capital. While an ever larger part of the money for non-US, non-European 'quality' film production continues to

18 See Catherine Grant, 'Camera solidaria', *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 4 (1997), pp. 311–28, and Hamid Naficy, 'Between rocks and hard places: the interstitial mode of production in exilic cinema', in Naficy (ed.), *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media and the Politics of Place* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 125–47, for more detailed discussion of these developments.

19 Corrigan, 'The commerce of auteurism', p. 118.

20 Richard Routt, 'Evidence', *Continuum: the Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1990). Online at: www.kafi.murdoch.edu.au/continuum/5.2/Routt.html

21 Andy Medhurst, 'That special thrill: Brief Encounter, homosexuality and authorship', *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1991), pp. 197–208; Richard Dyer, 'Believing in fairies: the author and the homosexual', in Diana Fuss (ed.), *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 185–201.

come from 'outside', and is tied to ever more complicated multinational coproduction and international distribution arrangements, the necessary translatability of these film projects, and of the commercial dramatizations of their auteurs' selves, has had an effect on the possibilities for the old style of cultural nationalism.¹⁸ This mode of filmmaking and distribution, though, is likely to exist alongside lower budget modes of production whose greater possibilities for local cultural reference could be enabled by the audience segmentation and 'niche' marketing which are intrinsic parts of pay-per-view media, dedicated film channels, and, of course, forms of digital broadcasting – at least as soon as these technologies begin to take root. I would argue, though, that the centrality of the auteur is unlikely to be diminished by the increasing takeup of these modes, and here I would point to Corrigan's insights about the increasing autonomy of contemporary auteurist consumption from the auteurist film text itself.

So far, in describing recent 'supply-side' trends in auteurism and predicting future ones, no single explanation has emerged as to the resistant 'demand-side' appeal of auteurism. In the final part of my discussion, I would like to gather together a few of the threads of explanation running through the work of the writers I have commented on. These suggest that 'pleasure' and 'identification' are at issue here. For example, Corrigan quotes Kluge's witty comment on auteurist identification: 'auteur cinema is not a minority phenomenon: all people relate to their experiences as authors – rather than [as] managers of department stores'.¹⁹ None of the writers quoted so far are very expansive as to what exactly the 'identificatory pleasures' of auteurism might be, however.

In his discussion of cinephilia in the auteurism debate, however, Richard Routt echoes Maule's idea of the 'interpellation of the "expert" audience' when he writes, of the 'educated' auteurist film viewer, that 'to recognize [an authorial signature], collect its appearances and comprehend its signification, then, argues for the value of one's regard over and above other viewers'.²⁰ This cultivation of auteurist sensibility, with the concomitant pleasures of cultish 'oneupmanship', which Routt describes as present from the earliest days of the *politique des auteurs*, were arguably always commercially mobilized – if initially only to sell small circulation film magazines. Richard Dyer and Andy Medhurst have written separately about the similar identificatory pleasures of auteurist reception for 'subcultural' audiences of gay men and lesbians when using their 'queer cultural competences', such as discovery, recognition, reading between the lines or against the grain.²¹ Although it is true to say that this particular 'niche market' took longer to be opened up to commercial exploitation than that mobilized by cinephilia *tout court*, a glance at contemporary queer film and video culture (including magazines and websites such as

www.planetout.popcornQ.com) would indicate that this process is more than well underway. The commodification of the forms of intersubjective reflexivity and identification only alluded to in Corrigan's study has, it seems, increased exponentially since 'The commerce of auteurism' was published.

It would appear from existing critical work on literary and film authorship that the images and interventions of authors might help to organize the fantasies, activities and pleasures of those who consume cultural products, and in turn to construct or 'authorize' these consumers as subjects: for instance, authors certainly seem to play a part in persistent cultural fantasies about the very possibilities of expressive meaning. I would add that auteurist reception is also clearly a reflexive cultural practice which is consciously (and, presumably, unconsciously) invested in and accumulated by consumers in various ways as we attempt to 'improve the value of ourselves'. Yet however much we might assume we know what is at stake in auteurist reception, I would argue that Authorship Studies would do well to recognize, as Corrigan appears in part to have done, that it can learn much from the insights of Star Studies. Researchers in this area have taken up questions about the pleasurable investments spectators might have in the interactive processes of star reception, and used Cultural Studies methods, including direct engagement with actual audiences and with forms of film culture beyond the film text itself.²² There are plenty of matters to examine in auteurism even if we just choose to follow the directions implicitly suggested by Corrigan's study. We might, for example, proceed by analyzing the kinds of stories we want film directors to tell us in promotional interviews and profiles, as well as the specific stories we require from particular kinds of auteurs: for instance, of expressive explanation and authorial intention, of overcoming 'adversity' to make the film and of the 'effect' on certain filmmakers of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or national context.²³

A large slice of – admittedly still rather unevenly 'globalized' – film fan culture has never been as easily accessible as it is now. The interactive, intersubjective formulations of contemporary US auteurism have recently been 'commercially enhanced' by the 'infotainment extras' supplied on feature-film DVDs and by the near ubiquity of promotional documentaries on the 'Making of the Latest Hollywood Release'. In addition, there are large numbers of auteur-based promotional and fan websites, online 'Q&A sessions' with directors, cybercasts, film downloads and other paraphernalia. While the audience currently accessing these forms might not even remotely resemble an exact cross-section of the 'global' audience for auteurism, it is already obvious that this new imagined community will only ever be meaningfully accessible in its multiple 'niche' forms. It is none the less interesting for that.

²² See, for example, Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²³ See, for example, the collection of some three hundred 'auteur' interviews collected since 1996 on the www.indieWIRE.com website, an independent-film resource. Interestingly, www.indieWIRE.com states in its introductory pitch that its site 'provides focused, concise content as an empowering tool and space for interactive and informed discussion, reflection and opinion'.

If Screen Studies has not always looked in as many places as it might for answers on authorship, it could well be that some of its strands are overinvested in the old ways of looking. After all, it has been said that auteurism authorized nascent Film Studies as an academic subject by lending it some of the organizational 'seriousness' enjoyed by literary authorship studies. Despite the timely poststructuralist and postmodernist critiques of auteurism that took place in the 1970s and 1980s, most major western-language publishers of academic Film Studies books have series organized around directors, and these are bought by film and media students the world over in order to supplement the many academic courses and symposia which are also organized around directors. An academic commerce in auteurism, then, continues apace, hardly touched by the earlier debates, except perhaps that many more previously marginal auteurial 'subjects' are invited for discussion (women, gays, non-white, non-western filmmakers, and so on). If Screen Studies is to find new and imaginative ways of tackling the challenges set by the increasing commodification of authorship, it would undoubtedly do well to consider once again its own origins, and to investigate and unravel its own understandable investments in cinephilic culture.

Stimulation or simulation?: how to deal with the historical in the new millennium

MYRA MACDONALD

¹ As part of the development of the Performing Arts Data Service, a University of Glasgow consortium has been working on a pilot project to develop the online delivery of moving images to academic institutions. The project has been initiated by the British Film Institute, the British Universities Film and Video Council and the Joint Information Systems Information Committee. For more information, see <http://www.pads.ahds.ac.uk/>

As we begin the second century to be recorded on film, opportunities for historical understanding have never been more plentiful or more accessible. Television retrospectives, video editions of film classics, and the expanding resources of the Internet ensure that at least a selection of the screen archive evades oblivion. When PADS (the Performing Arts Data Service) has completed its pilot stages, it promises access to television and film archives online, accompanied by related notes on technical details and context.¹ While these developments open up extensive possibilities for exploring the history of the screen, the contemporary currency of past texts does not of

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¹ As part of the development of the Performing Arts Data Service, a University of Glasgow consortium has been working on a pilot project to develop the online delivery of moving images to academic institutions. The project has been initiated by the British Film Institute, the British Universities Film and Video Council and the Joint Information Systems Information Committee. For more information, see <http://www.pads.ahds.ac.uk/>

As we begin the second century to be recorded on film, opportunities for historical understanding have never been more plentiful or more accessible. Television retrospectives, video editions of film classics, and the expanding resources of the Internet ensure that at least a selection of the screen archive evades oblivion. When PADS (the Performing Arts Data Service) has completed its pilot stages, it promises access to television and film archives online, accompanied by related notes on technical details and context.¹ While these developments open up extensive possibilities for exploring the history of the screen, the contemporary currency of past texts does not of

itself engender historical consciousness. If pedagogic intervention is one means of facilitating this, a variety of factors is converging to complicate the task. Institutional constraints, a postmodern *Zeitgeist*, a rapidly evolving student experience of the screen, and the digitization of the moving image conspire against historical sensibilities and test ingenuity in curriculum design.

My argument is predicated on the contention that the fostering of a historical consciousness remains a vital ingredient in Screen Studies. It might indeed be claimed that those activities intrinsic to the development of historical sensibilities constitute key components of intellectual endeavour within the humanities and social sciences. Historical consciousness requires an active ability to think in a situated rather than an abstract way about change, and depends on a refusal to conceptualize the past as a territory around which definitive borders can be drawn. Its enquiring approach to interconnectedness both across time and within specific periods combines with a rigorous evaluation of differing source material to distinguish the formation of social knowledge from the mere acquisition of information.

Within Film Studies and, more erratically, within Media Studies, curricula have hitherto embedded the principle of cultivating historical sensibilities within their design. Tendencies to separate teaching of film and television may have overemphasized distinctiveness and eclipsed the interrelated aspects of their trajectories (as, for example, in the teaching of documentary), but exploration of the relations between past and present and between cultural, social and economic factors in the directing of technological and aesthetic change remain core elements in many courses. In a new century, there is fresh work for historical analysis to undertake: aiding in judicious evaluation of both the utopian and the dystopian discourses emerging around the 'new media', and alerting us to theoretical challenges to established modes of thinking about the screen. Without a historical consciousness, it is tempting to be seduced by apparent, but misleading, novelty, and to miss incongruities that should stop us in our tracks as we try to absorb new developments into existing conceptual paradigms. What, for example, will happen to a foundational concept such as 'representation' in a digital age; and what is the justification for incorporating the Internet into established syllabuses on the media when its relations between ownership, text and audience/user operate in such distinctive ways?

As a discursively accentuated break between the centuries turns even the latter decades of the twentieth century into a prehistoric age for our younger students at least, historical consciousness has another key role to play. Founding texts of film theory, including Laura Mulvey's 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema' (1975), Colin McCabe's 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian

- 2 Mulvey, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1975), pp. 6–18; Colin McCabe, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 7–27; Colin McArthur (ed.), *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: British Film Institute, 1982).

- 3 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 6.
4 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992).

- 5 For an interesting discussion of such adjustments, see Julianne Pidduck, 'Of windows and country walks: frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations', *Screen*, vol. 39, no. 4 (1998), pp. 381–400.

- 6 Fredric Jameson, 'On magic realism in film', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 12, no. 1 (1986), p. 318.

theses' (1974), or the collection of groundbreaking essays on Scottish film and television edited by Colin McArthur, *Scotch Reels* (1982),² will be intelligible to current and future students only through a mapping out of the intellectual roots that helped produce them. Even in a less crowded curriculum, under more modest pressures from an expanding contemporary agenda, this is no easy undertaking, requiring forays into Marxist and feminist thought, each with a complex history of its own.

Prime conditions for encouraging the formation of historical consciousness lie in a measure of interdisciplinarity combined with a progressively developmental core curriculum. Neither of these, however, is easily sustainable in the current academic climate, at least in Britain. Pressure to tighten up discipline boundaries (inspired by 'quality control' measures in teaching and research evaluation) sits uneasily with the demand for exciting 'pick'n'mix' modularized programmes which allow maximum student choice and are increasingly market-driven and eclectic. With the additional challenge of keeping the curriculum in a rapidly expanding subject area up-to-date, the appeal of jettisoning elements of historicity in favour of the contemporary may become irresistible. As a British government committed to 'joined-up thinking' in its own policy formations imposes constraints on its higher education system, the academy's ability to foster an enquiring approach to interconnections between past and present comes, ironically, under increasing threat.

Belief in a postmodern *Zeitgeist* also diminishes the stature of the historical. While postmodernism embraces the commodification of the past through the burgeoning heritage industry, it is also marked, as Fredric Jameson notes, by a 'weakening of historicity'.³ Although Fukuyama's claims of 'the end of history'⁴ may be widely recognized as premature, the postmodern celebration of nostalgia enables an interest in the past to be kept alive while centring this on a recognition of periodicity that neglects the gap, or the continuities, between then and now. Few spectators of costume dramas or heritage films based on eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novels, for example, are likely to be aware of the adjustments to the text inspired by perceived cultural shifts as they revel in the sensual pleasures of period detail.⁵ Jameson comments that 'nostalgia films' both replace and also inhibit historical understanding:

Nostalgia gives us the image of various generations of the past as fashion-plate images that entertain no determinable ideological relationship to other moments of time: they are not the outcome of anything, nor are they the antecedents of our present; they are simply images.⁶

Postmodern sensibilities gain sustenance from the unprecedented access to historical imagery offered by film and television, in both fictional and actuality modes. Despite the ability of exceptional

7 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 1990) and *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995).

historical series such as the *People's Century* (BBC/WGBH, 1995–7) to stimulate historical consciousness, our ready access to images of the twentieth century has more generally encouraged a temporal equivalent to the spatial concept of the 'tourist gaze' as outlined by John Urry.⁷ The economy of looking of the 'tourist gaze' emerges out of the commodification of travel and the role of publicity material, tourist guides and media discussion in identifying key sites of interest and creating anticipation about their appeal. Although these require to be distinct from the ordinary (making it virtually impossible to see one's own habitat as a tourist would), the high degree of familiarity they acquire through repeated reproduction impels the pleasure of recognition, of being there and seeing for oneself, and of apparently individualizing and assimilating the experience by taking one's own photographs or camcorder footage. Aspects of these spatial relationships can be likened to temporal economies of looking. The currency of 'key moments' of the twentieth century in our collective image bank directs our 'historical gaze' similarly to seek out or create the crossing point between the familiar and the alien. Distance from the present affirms historical exoticism, justifying curiosity and interest; but mediatized popular memory is formed, like our tourist consciousness, by combining the declared importance of that which we have not experienced directly for ourselves with its ability to be incorporated into familiar cultural rhetorics.

Students' ease in relating to the mantra of what (on analogy with 'vulgar Marxism') might be dubbed 'vulgar postmodernism' emerges out of their cultural and image-based experiences. The collapse of 'grand narratives', the proliferation of commodification, the celebration of spectacle, omnipresent intertextuality and tongue-in-cheek lack of seriousness all appear as recognizable facets of millennial western cultural experience. The familiarity of the recognizable can, however, blunt analysis and lead to a recitation of alleged 'postmodern characteristics' (especially evident in many student essays and dissertations on the work of Quentin Tarantino). For pedagogy to encourage critical evaluation rather than celebration of the postmodern, postmodernism itself needs to be historicized. Without an understanding of modernism, this is difficult to achieve. Despite the pressures against developmental study posed by modularization, situating postmodernism (along, for that matter, with the other 'post' movements) as variously an emanation from, as well as a reaction to and against, the movement that preceded it ensures less heady and erroneous perceptions of novelty while encouraging sensitivity to changes of direction and shifting sensibilities.

If one of the key features distinguishing the postmodern from the modern is, to paraphrase David Harvey, a radical departure in attitudes to space⁸ or, in Jameson's terms, the new domination of

8 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 66.

experience 'by categories of space rather than by categories of time',⁹ students' rapidly changing experience of the screen appears to confirm this trend. As the home or office workstation predominates over the darkened auditorium in the routines of daily life, the Internet, the multimedia screen and the proliferation of digital imaging in differing ways promote spatial over temporal relations. The very terms and metaphors we deploy in relation to explorations of the World Wide Web ('cyberspace', 'surfing', 'navigating') emphasize travel through space rather than time, even if at the click of a mouse we can call up stills from old movies, check out contemporary films' intertextual referencing of past classics, and visit elaborately documented centennial sites. Search mechanisms, with their spatial configurations, establish an economy of connectedness by relay. This emphasizes contiguity and apparent equivalence over the complexities of temporal distance and difference. Although in one sense opening a movie database on the Net resembles consulting a printed film guide, with its standardized format of delivering information regardless of period, the movement of entering into the screen space and engaging with the search cues intensifies the disorienting sense of chronological equivalence between films from different periods.

This effect is likely to be accentuated by the commercial development of the Internet and by its consequent approach to interactivity. Pedagogically, interactivity has positive connotations of active learning at one's own pace and in line with one's own selected areas of special interest; but in a digital multimedia age where investment in new technologies and transmission systems hinges on expectation of profit, interactivity cannot avoid being primarily commercially driven. Sites that deal with film or television as entertainment are designed more to encourage fandom and invite consumption than to develop contextual understanding of texts. The Internet Movie Database (<http://uk.imdb.com>) includes soundtrack listings as an element in 'Fun Stuff' alongside 'Trivia', and is geared to promoting CD sales rather than enhancing awareness of the interaction between soundtrack, image and narrative. Educationally-motivated databases, such as those being developed by PADS, will require skilful pedagogy to encourage a textured sense of historical development which avoids the repetitive ahistorical flatness of consumer-led forms of interactivity.

The multimedia screen promotes unprecedented forms of looking and listening where distraction is built into the spatial configuration, rather than existing outside the screen. John Ellis's classic distinction between the cinematic 'gaze' and the 'glance' at the television screen¹⁰ requires refinement in the new conditions. While the 'glance' implies a brief engagement with a visual stimulus as our attention is primarily absorbed elsewhere, the multimedia screen invites us to move rapidly between competing stimuli – whether text material,

10 John Ellis, *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

three-dimensional graphics, real-time audio, or window video images – all of which vie for our momentary attention. To the ‘gaze’ and the ‘glance’ we might need to add the more spatially textured notion of the ‘flit’, as the economy of looking traverses customary boundaries between media, between genres, and even between the screen-as-workstation and the screen-as-site-of-entertainment. The ‘flit’ encourages a form of connection between images, or images and sounds, that depends on arbitrary juxtapositions rather than on any conceptual link. If the multimedia screen becomes a commonplace reality for third millennium students, this may exacerbate what is already a weakening of an interrogative attitude to the relationship between different levels of signification. The practice of ‘montage’, with (in its Soviet origins) its deliberate evocation of tension and contradiction between rapidly edited sequences, loses its critical edge for audiences trained by advertisements and pop promo videos to regard fast cutting between divergent images as routine spectacle. If every form of signification is potentially ironic, the perception of ironic tension between images, or between image and sound, paradoxically declines. Concepts such as ‘dialectic’, ‘contradiction’ and ‘contestation’ seem increasingly elusive to students accustomed to a regular phantasmagoria of disjointed juxtapositions. In Jamesonian manner, they bear witness to the efficacy with which acceptance of pastiche or ‘blank parody’¹¹ replaces the critical incisiveness of the parodic. While it cannot be deduced that this of itself necessarily pre-empts historical consciousness, it adds another impediment to its development, by increasing the disincentives to probe relationships and query potential contradictoriness.

Yet the Internet also has the benefit of encouraging enthusiasms and interest groups, and in a much more participatory form of communication than has been habitual through the mass media. With the enhanced accessibility of information about the past, and the ability to engage in dialogue with other interested individuals or groups, there are new opportunities for researching screen history and for developing the curiosity about earlier developments that triggers historical consciousness. Improved access to historical texts can in itself produce surprising results. While no-one teaching film in the 1990s would have been surprised to learn that Tarantino’s films feature in the top twenty per cent of the highest rated 250 films on the Internet Movie Database (August 1999), the ranking of Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal* (1957) in the top fifty per cent, with a higher average voter rating than *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996) (even if fewer votes were cast), suggests that some of the suppositions that filter through into curriculum design about the overwhelming popular appeal of contemporary American movies may mistake ready availability for possibilities of enjoyment and acclaim. The very process of the journeying through cyberspace that can be

11 Jameson, *Pastmodernism*, p. 17.

hostile to the formation of historical sensibilities may also be the means of enlivening contemporary interest in history and of raising awareness that this interest is shared by others. Centralization of archive facilities, together with the costs of travel and accommodation, have been major obstacles to students' historical researches outside the major centres. The resources of the Internet may still be patchy in what they can deliver in this area, but they offer a growing facility for primary investigation.

Digital imaging, by intensifying formal preoccupation with spatial density and layering as opposed to linear sequencing, looks set to crystallize the dominance of spatial over temporal awareness. Digital video already promises instantaneous selection of particular sequences, perfect freeze-frame facilities and a selection of supplementary materials including interviews with directors, storyboards, and publicity materials. However invaluable these developments may be for the analysis of particular sequences of film, they require, as other contributors to this issue argue, fresh thinking about screen aesthetics and viewing relations. The possibility of easy manipulation of the image, at the moment of reception as well as of production, suggests the ascendancy of the Baudrillardian simulacrum, as copies or constructs without traceable or knowable originals predominate even in 'reality' television. One repercussion of these developments, as Barbara Creed points out elsewhere in this issue, will be to channel creative ideas, at least in film, yet further away from realism and towards fantasy. While the success of 1990s films such as *Schindler's List* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and *Saving Private Ryan* (Steven Spielberg, 1998) indicates that rumours of the death of realism may be premature, digital imaging and editing will further rupture relations between the screen image and the real material world. Excitement about what is new in film (and, increasingly, on television also) is more likely to centre on fantasy genres or animation than on genres with their roots in realism or naturalism.

By playing through students' own creative practices and ambitions, this tendency may further skew a move away from the historical. As Nils Lindahl Elliot argues elsewhere in this issue, the lure of experimentation, creativity and tangibility inherent in practical work and its perceived vocational purchase have long set their own challenges for the delivery of theory in the curriculum. The speed of technological change and the greater capacity to achieve professional standards of production in a digital age, combined with students' enthusiasms for being at the 'cutting edge' of (marketable) production practices, will increase their existing proclivities towards the contemporaneous and the novel. If the digital revolution succeeds in opening up a wider range of niche markets for film and television, this may, on the other hand, encourage a wider diversity of experimentation that will revive interest in avant-garde aesthetics and

prompt fresh investigations of a wider range of film styles, both internationally and historically.

While this discussion has focused on the challenges to historical consciousness arising from the changing configurations of the screen, it is not intended as a lament for a hypothetical and illusory golden age when historical sensibilities reigned supreme. Successful pedagogic strategies are already being devised to respond to the difficulties outlined here. Modules that focus on topics such as 'screening the city' or on developments in crime drama on television can, at their best, encourage historical understanding of media theory, explore the relation between the modern and the postmodern, and arouse curiosity about the evolving connections between aesthetics, technological knowhow and social preoccupations. The growing interest in screen music suggests another fruitful means of stimulating awareness of the difference between historical recognition and historical understanding (indeed the distinctive evocation of the past through sound rather than image raises the interesting possibility that this might be a particularly productive route to developing historical consciousness). Digitization and the World Wide Web look set to remove one major impediment to historical enthusiasms by enabling extended access to archive material, especially from television, where poor availability has previously hampered student interest, the feasibility of research projects, and publication. Lifting this barrier may of itself succeed in arousing the historical curiosity that is a key prerequisite for the flowering of historical consciousness.

Proliferating screens

WILL STRAW

One of the difficulties of talking about cinema in the present moment stems from the withering of a longstanding dichotomy between film and television. Alongside the 'vibrant colours and fine details' of IMAX,¹ we confront the obscure, flickering imagery of Quicktime film extracts on our computers. At both extremes, screen sizes and formats have proliferated, but the relationship between scale and a classical, primary experience of cinema is not obvious. The IMAX screen's capacity for spectacle is regularly employed in the service of 'minor' cinematic forms, such as the travelogue, just as the obscure

¹ Charles Acland, 'IMAX technology and the tourist gaze', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1998), p. 429.

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and tiny digital screen may restore something of the enchantment of the cinema in its most cherished historical moments.

Among recent artworks engaging with the cinema, one of the most compelling is the installation *In Your Dreams* by the Canadian artist Gisele Amantea (Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, 1999). The work displays thirty-one tiny snowglobes (those small novelties one turns over and shakes, producing a flurry of snow-like material) arranged along three shelves. Each of these globes, connected to a hidden video playback device, contains a mirror reflecting loops from long-ago films (Ingrid Bergman in *Joan of Arc*, Busby Berkeley choreographies, melodramatic quarrels, and so on). In a variety of ways, this installation suggests the multiple vectors along which our experience of cinema is being transformed. The snowglobes are both quaint – leftovers from an earlier regime of enchantment – and unexpectedly contemporary. As murky images flutter within them, barely decipherable from a distance, they resemble the popdown screens of planes or intercity buses, or the portable audiovisual playback devices we glimpse in the hands of nearby strangers. The installation, like these new technologies generally, sets in place a visual field in which a global industry's polished products are regularly reduced to murky fluctuations of movement and colour, unfolding at the margins of our vision or attention.

As the channels in which we glimpse the cinematic shrink and proliferate, we presume, nevertheless, that the audiovisual texts they display will be more or less identifiable, that an extended look will allow us to affix to them the familiar brand names of films or television programmes. While the spectacular quality of audiovisual texts is so often diminished, across the range of minor, low-definition channels through which they pass, our ability to identify such texts has grown. This recognizability is nourished by repetition, by an expansion in the number of windows and promotional sites through which these texts travel and accumulate the markers of distinct brands and identities.

Predictions about the future of audiovisual media have long been fixated on the dissolution of boundaries. Most accounts of contemporary audiovisual media stress the withering of differences between media channels, between discrete textual forms, between the simulated and the faithfully reproduced. Video, Raymond Bellour once suggested, is both the material basis and the symptom of all these passages and dissolutions, processes magnified in the computer's reduction of audiovisual texts to streams of code.² Global media, here, are to be imagined as an open-ended system of interconnection and passage, in which the distinct status of individual audiovisual texts is dissolved. This is the view of things most often embraced within a range of contemporary theoretical models, with their affinity for energetic lines, currents and flows.

Against these scenarios, however, we might set the detachability of

2 Raymond Bellour, 'The power of words, the power of images', *Camera Obscura*, no. 24 (1990), p. 7.

the contemporary audiovisual text, its circulation as a discrete commodity across multiple sites of exhibition and consumption. As windows for the marketing of films proliferate, the branding of films as discrete entities is heightened, such that they maintain their distinctiveness across every channel of exhibition, from the retail videocassette to the pay-per-view event. More pointedly, television programmes are increasingly designed for an existence separate from the sorts of flow in which we once expected them to appear, endowed with a self-sufficiency that allows them to fit into the schedules of innumerable networks and specialized cable and satellite channels around the world. If the number of contexts for audiovisual texts is now chaotically expanded, programming itself has assumed modular forms which find easy entry into such contexts.

This is one effect of broadcasting systems which increasingly efface their place of origin, and of a programming industry marked by an international division of labour. Canadians have long been aware that their documentaries, half-hour animated series and hour-long historical dramas must be designed as 'strips' for the export market. They are commodities in an international economy which requires that they be slotted into schedules with little concern for a broader context of understanding. Specialized channels devoted to history, nature, lifestyle or addressed to various ethnic groups rely less and less on direct modes of address, on the sorts of discursive shifters which might ground their programming in a distinct place and time. Rather, they offer endless sequences of discrete texts, whose diversity of origins no longer strikes us as unusual.

This diversity works against our ability to attribute any coherent ideological or civic project to a network (a British crime series from the mid 1980s leads into a recent *Law and Order* rerun, then to a new biography of John Kennedy, Jr, and from this to a public domain film from the early 1950s). Rather than producing a coherent and univocal sense of flow, cable and satellite channels presume prior acknowledgement of each programme's distinct individuality and integrity. That familiarity has almost always been produced *elsewhere*, in the prior history of these programmes, or of the national and generic codes upon which they draw. Science-fiction films, from *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) to *Starship Troopers* (Paul Verhoeven, 1997), imagine the television of the future as an unending system for direct address and interpellation. This runs counter to the economic logics of television programming, more and more dependent on the transnational sale of detachable audiovisual texts. Even CNN, in the wake of its merger with *Time*, moved from ongoing news 'flow' to a series of magazine blocks, each given a distinct, previously established brand and designed for individual sales or repetition.

In the mid 1980s, the French critic Guy Scarpetta noted the difficulty with which the idea of video as a process (rather than a

product) found adherents within the artworld.³ Instead, he suggests, the term 'video' quickly came to designate the *tape*, the discrete physical and commodity form on which televisual signals were encoded. Mobility in the audiovisual world came less from the withering of boundaries between channels, as ambitiously utopian scenarios had envisioned, than from the circulation of discrete texts through and across them. Similarly, the creation of ever more spectacular environments for the projection of films has done little to dissolve boundaries between the film text and these environments. Scenarios for the synthesis of technologically-based audiovisual forms have produced few popular examples of cinematic works which break through the frame of the screen, rather than simply extending or reshaping it.

The thirty-one snowglobes of *In Your Dreams* perfectly capture this proliferation of exhibition windows, even as close examination of each image reveals it to evoke a precise moment in the history of classical cinema. In its miniaturization, each of these moments is rendered punctual and fleeting, but this is not because the boundaries between them have broken down. On the contrary, that individuality has been reduced to the most basic visual gestures through which historical period, studio look or genre convention are conveyed. Each image now functions as the crystallization of a rich and identifiable aesthetic system, and has thus retained its individuality. Together, each image and its container – each film loop and snowglobe – produces an almost tangible artefactuality, and one could easily imagine them as domestic toys or curiosities. Like the scratches from old vinyl records employed in contemporary musical sampling, the murky, archaic qualities of image and snowglobe work to re-enchant those contemporary practices in which they are employed.

Here, too, we might express caution with respect to widespread ways of imagining contemporary audiovisual culture. Against every scenario which asserts the dematerialization of the audiovisual, its reduction to information and virtuality, we must note the contemporary explosion of artefacts. Quasi-cinematic toys and trinkets, portable storage and display devices and other material props of an audiovisual culture have proliferated, each offering images and sounds in distinctive ways dependent on their own technological complexity and purposes. As screens take their place in the corners of our kitchen or in a range of transportation vehicles, they mark and define space in ways which belie their status as simple carriers of an information whose origin is elsewhere. As much as these proliferating screens invite us to rethink the status of audiovisual information, they suggest that we consider new ways in which that information comes to be attached to space.

We may, in fact, amidst widespread discussion of dematerialization and virtuality, speak of an expanded life for physical artefacts, for cultural commodities whose tangible forms circulate throughout the

world. The sense that this tangibility remains resonant in an age of imminent dematerialization may be seen in the preoccupation of so many recent artworks with collection and display. Among the many paradoxes of digital communication is the extent to which Internet-based commerce, most spectacularly through such auction services as Ebay, has resulted in millions of trivia items re-entering the marketplace for tangible artefacts and being sent across the world. We may also glimpse these countervailing tendencies in the growth of labyrinthine retail outlets in which books, music and videotapes – arguably those cultural forms most susceptible to dematerialization – are made available in ever-increasing numbers. New screens partake of this persistence of tangibility, affixing audiovisual imagery to a variety of *things* scattered throughout our everyday environments.

National pasts and futures: Indian cinema

RAVI S. VASUDEVAN

Looking back at Screen Studies over the past ten years or so, there emerges a strong impression of the ways in which historical analysis has provided the armature for several focuses. Research into preclassical forms in the study of early Euro-American cinema now constitutes a significant body of work, enabling us to think of narrative cinema in non-teleological ways. Simultaneously, film scholars have begun to explore many different histories as these are played out across the world and as they interact in complex ways. Here, the question of national film cultures has provided a crucial way of disaggregating wider theorizations of film. Initially this was often posed in a defensive way in order to highlight patterns of distinction and difference, emphasizing particularity against the hegemonic norms of narrative filmmaking associated with Hollywood cinema. Today, however, it is possible to pose another future for Screen Studies, one which might look to a more intricate cultural history of identity: to the web of exchanges, flows and translations that underlie cultural identity; to the negotiations of territoriality, in markets and geolinguistic spaces, that govern its changing terms; and to the ways in which these issues are reframed through new technologies of distribution and delivery.

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Looking back at Screen Studies over the past ten years or so, there emerges a strong impression of the ways in which historical analysis has provided the armature for several focuses. Research into preclassical forms in the study of early Euro-American cinema now constitutes a significant body of work, enabling us to think of narrative cinema in non-teleological ways. Simultaneously, film scholars have begun to explore many different histories as these are played out across the world and as they interact in complex ways. Here, the question of national film cultures has provided a crucial way of disaggregating wider theorizations of film. Initially this was often posed in a defensive way in order to highlight patterns of distinction and difference, emphasizing particularity against the hegemonic norms of narrative filmmaking associated with Hollywood cinema. Today, however, it is possible to pose another future for Screen Studies, one which might look to a more intricate cultural history of identity: to the web of exchanges, flows and translations that underlie cultural identity; to the negotiations of territoriality, in markets and geolinguistic spaces, that govern its changing terms; and to the ways in which these issues are reframed through new technologies of distribution and delivery.

In post-independence India, we are presented with a multilingual state, a federal form in which the internal division of states is governed by linguistic and ethnic identities. Historically, attempts to alter this situation by arguing for Hindi as the national language have met with little success and periodic reaction. For some time, the central state structure has been widely regarded as dominated by a north Indian Hindu and Hindi-speaking public; and, from the mid 1980s, a Hindutva – or Hindu state movement – emerged, aiming to institute the rule of the majority Hindu population. This movement has adopted various strategies, but its fundamental aim is to convert an amorphous, multitrade traditional religion such as Hinduism, a religion practised in very different ways across the languages and cultures of the country and split by caste hierarchies, into an ethnic-political identity that would transcend linguistic, cultural and social differences. Despite the movement's reference to archaic tradition and religious iconography for mobilization, it has increasingly sought to present itself as an unmarked, universal form that would lift a backward country into the modern world. To establish itself as the true locus of national identity, the Hindutva movement has ideologically and physically targeted various minority formations, primarily the Muslim, but in the recent past Indian Christians as well, as cultural others. In the last two years, the movement's political wing, the Bhartiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) has led coalition governments composed of various regional alliances.

In complicated ways, Indian cinema has both played on and contributed to these political formations. The Bombay Hindi cinema, catering to the largest language market, was for many years the dominant cinema of India, and it has developed a symbolic narrative of national hierarchy related to the political process. By the 1980s, however, the Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam cinema industries of the southern Indian states were making at least as many films, if for smaller markets. Rather than a fixed set of linguistic cultural identities being formed through these different industrial spaces, film industries had, from the period of sound cinema onwards, sought to fashion products which could move amongst a series of markets through dubbing and multiple versions. The unravelling of this history suggests new directions for Film Studies in India; its mission not only to construct a greater sense of the complex history we inherit, but to contribute to the history of the present and the future, a mission sometimes overwhelmed by a chauvinist mobilization which invites us to forget that the major Indian cities are composed of multiethnic populations. These are defined not only by their difference from each other, but by their mutual negotiation through overlapping cultural forms and multiple modes of consumption and everyday interaction. Studios in cities such as Bombay and Madras were dense circuits of multilingual talent working through different language cinemas (sometimes languages overlapped in a single film).

As Madhava Prasad has shown, a more rigid differentiation took place along with the drive, following independence, to carve out linguistic states.¹ Nevertheless, a substantial flow across boundaries, certainly in the southern states, has continued to take place through dubbing.

A complex historical account of the changing patterns of film production and its constituencies would bring into focus the ever more complicated map of diversity and overlap in India's contemporary audiovisual sphere. It is here, in the efflorescence of new systems of delivery, especially satellite relays and cheap cable networks, that a picture of the future seems most radically presaged. In a context in which cheap cable access is still beyond the reach of a substantial part of the population, India's state television, Doordarshan, still dominates the field through its extensive network of terrestrial broadcast. But satellite channels relayed through cable command very substantial viewerships in India's populous cities and small towns and amongst the well-to-do in the countryside. The big players in this field are Rupert Murdoch's STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region) network and the local media tycoon Subhash Chandra's Zee Television. As with other global powers, Murdoch's network has had to adapt to local cultural preferences. Its entertainment channel Star Plus initially showed English-language programmes, but had to change to Hindi programming in the mid 1990s. Zee has been the frontrunner in this field, nationally and internationally. For the years 1998–9, Zee Telefilms' export was expected to account for over sixty per cent of its turnover. The company exports software to the UK, South Africa, Mauritius and the USA. In 1999 the Zee network, which already had a foothold in Mauritius and the UK, was preparing to link up with local cable networks in Canada, South Africa and the West Indies to relay its channels. Sony Entertainment Television has entered the satellite wars as well, and has been Zee's main competitor in Hindi satellite television broadcasting. But there are a host of other channels in India's multilingual state, catering to distinct language constituencies including Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Gujarati and Punjabi. In a way which both echoes and differs from the history of Indian cinema audiences, these channels address language communities which are both regionally concentrated and geographically dispersed, carving out distinct communicative swathes across the Indian nation state. One result is that Indian film, both as archival entity and contemporary form, has entered people's homes in unprecedented ways. For, despite the elaboration of institutions of the audiovisual image, film, both on special movie channels and in regular film programming on all channels, continues to provide the principal attraction as well as constituting the main premiss for a host of television formats, including film song and personality based programmes, MTV and MTV-style chart programmes, sitcoms and

serials reliant on film nostalgia and pastiche, and public participatory programmes such as quizzes, dance and song competitions based on performative knowledge of the cinema.

This scenario would appear to suggest contradictory directions for the future of a national cinema. The national culture appears to be in process of disaggregation into disparate components. In a nation state where the politics of linguistic and ethnic difference has been a persistent issue, the carving out of distinct linguistic constituencies through television might seem to promote internal fracturing. For example, people from the southern states of Kerala, Tamilnadu, Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh living on the linguistic margins in metropolises such as Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta can reproduce themselves as part of a linguistic cultural community by assembling a menu of television programmes and films from Asianet and Surya (Malayalam satellite channels), Sun, Raj, Vijay and Nila (Tamil), Udaya (Kannada), Eenadu (Telugu), as well as from the terrestrial channels in these languages available through Doordarshan.

However, the opposition between hegemonic national cultures and resistant – or at least divergent – local languages and cultures is hardly straightforward. On the one hand, the national and global relayers of Indian national identity are keen to make incursions in local/regional language networks: Zee, for example, plans to launch a number of ‘regional’ language channels. And regional language networks resort to dubbing from and into Hindi: so that Vijay, a Tamil channel, for example, has dubbed Ramanand Sagar’s *Ramayana* into Tamil. This mythological serial, one of state television’s major successes in the 1980s, has often been seen as part of the major move to refigure national cultural and political identity in ways that subordinate ethnic and religious groups at the margins of a dominant north Indian Hindu public. At the same time, there has been substantial identification of certain channels with distinct regional political identities; as for example the Tamil Sun Channel, associated with the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Tamilnadu. In some fashion, this relates the channel to traditions of Tamil nationalism pitted against the Hindu Brahmanical order and Hindi linguistic hegemony, however qualified and increasingly compromised these currents have now become. More crudely, there is JJTV, recently reincarnated as Jaya TV, the vehicle of the DMK’s chief opponent, J. Jayalalitha. And, to add a further layer of complexity, the Malayalam Asianet bears ties to the Communist Party of India (Marxist), presently dominant partner in the ruling front in Kerala; though here, too, recent changes in ownership may herald a transformation in that relationship.

On the other hand the foreign incursion from the skies and through new initiatives by Hollywood companies has not assumed the dimensions feared by critics. Dubbed US cinema, pushed by companies such as Columbia TriStar, Warner Bros, Fox and Disney,

has had very few successes in India, and these have largely involved films displaying huge investments in special effects, such as *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1995), *Godzilla* (Roland Emmerich, 1998) and *Armageddon* (Michael Bay, 1998). The exception is *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1998), which also performed remarkably well in its English version. A clue to this film's ability to do well in such diverse markets may lie in the apocryphal observation by a local critic that *Titanic* is just like a Hindi film. Alongside its regime of spectacle, *Titanic* mobilizes the intimate registers of the woman's film together with the grand melodramatic gesture, the manicured writ large, characteristic of a form which has remained important in the Indian context. *Titanic*, however, is an exception, and the dubbed Hollywood action film has something of the status of a B movie in local circuits. A more segmented market, facilitated by a proliferation of multiplexes in the metropolises has, however, ensured a certain audience for the smaller Hollywood film, as well as for independent Indian films such as *Hyderabad Blues* (Nagesh Kukunoor, 1999) and *Bombay Boys* (Kaisar Gustad, 1999). Attempts by Hollywood to enter distribution and make financial tie-ups with the local industry, enabled by a liberalization of Indian government policy, have so far been hesitant and unmarked by success.

At another level, Hollywood continues to function as a crucial marker of film form, one aligned to the debates on national modernity that have defined Indian political imperatives since independence. Earlier debates over national and international form have persisted but have also, implicitly, been reframed. Thus, the realist critique of the melodramatic and distractive form of Indian popular cinema, of its excessively pitched histrionic narratives punctuated by 'untidily' placed musical and comedy sequences, is both carried on and subtly sidelined by a logic of appropriation and segmentation. When the critique was originally launched in the 1950s by a realist art cinema and criticism, this was very much part of a cultural-political project to develop a realist and rationalist disposition in the citizen-spectator. In this argument cinema, allied to other processes of social and economic modernization and to the dissemination of scientific education, would cultivate a citizenry for a new nation no longer burdened by feudal allegiances and superstitious and irrational attitudes. That a realist art cinema faced with dwindling state support has gone into decline is only one reason for this critique's loss of force. Various tendencies within commercial cinema have adapted realist characterization and an imagery of the ordinary citizen, but to different ends, promoting not a critical outlook on society and the nation state but a patriotic attitude. The result is a peculiar muffling of those realist critiques which castigated the popular cinema for its fantastical, larger-than-life narratives. At the same time, these new trends in popular cinema have sidelined both the earlier agendas of the realist trend and also

2 See Tejaswini Niranjana's argument, 'Integrating whose nation? Tourists and terrorists in Roja', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Bombay, 15 January 1994.

those previous strands of commercial cinema which highlighted issues of inequality in their construction of national narratives. The work of the Tamil director, Mani Rathnam, for example, displays this new armature of Hollywoodized form with a somewhat complacent middle-class patriotic address.² This director has also successfully dubbed his work into Hindi, thus mobilizing a pan-Indian national audience.

But here we need to look beyond the domestic market for Indian cinema. It is significant that in recent times markets for Indian cinema abroad have often produced more reliable returns than the domestic circuit. While foreign earnings are still only a small proportion of overall film earnings, they constitute a significant enough segment to play an increasingly important part in the calculations of some Indian filmmakers and distributors. The main object of film exports is the Hindi film and, in a secondary but not negligible way, the popular Tamil cinema. (The recent emergence of the Tamil idol Rajnikant as a cult figure reaching out beyond emigre Tamils to Japanese audiences is of interest here). Accounts by exhibitors in trade papers would indicate that the favoured export item is defined by an excessive coherence, as expatriate Indian audiences are apparently attracted to the conventions of Bombay romance and family genres, as in *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun/Who am I to You* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge/Brave of Heart Wins the Bride* (Aditya Chopra, 1996), *Pardes/Foreign Land* (Subhas Ghai, 1997), *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai/A Certain Feeling* (Karan Johar, 1998). These accounts suggest that other contemporary staples, such as action/vendetta genres, which represent Indian life as violent and sordid, do not do well. This, however, may not be an entirely accurate picture, and it is likely that Hindi action films may have audiences in a variety of territories.

The spate of films which have featured emigre Indians seeking to recover their roots, such as *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Pardes*, may have elicited a particular identification from audiences in the high-profile and commercially important markets of the UK, USA and Canada. Emigres' embrace of these films may be driven not only by a need to manage cultural change, especially as it is experienced by the young, but also as a means of cultivating a proud heritage, cultural capital to go with successful adaptation to new situations and opportunities. The seriousness with which Hollywood looks at this audience segment and at a global multicultural constituency is indicated by the withdrawal of quotations from the *Bhagavad Gita* from the soundtrack of the orgy scene in *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999), carried out in response to the campaigns of Hindu lobbies in the USA, South Africa and India. However, as Patricia Uberoi has recently argued, the narratives of the emigre straddle spaces. These films can also be viewed as representing the way the domestic representatives of a cosmopolitan

3 Patricia Uberoi, 'The diaspora comes home: disciplining desire in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, new series, vol. 32, no. 2 (1998).

middle class seek to negotiate and legitimize their relationship to a globalizing modernity by projecting their dilemmas onto the expatriate.³

Recent Hindi film hits seek sanction for globalizing initiatives from the avowedly traditional hierarchies of familial authority. On the other hand Rathnam's films, which celebrate conjugal romance and a certain autonomy for modern ways, have also met with success abroad. This suggests that the cinema deploys different strategies to address the globalizing nation, in this case one which can include a more sophisticated, cosmopolitan middle class. Rathnam cites Spielberg and Coppola as favourite directors, while acknowledging his fondness for the emblematic Indian patriotic saga of the 1950s, *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1957): hence the particular mix in his work, his fascination with the induction of the 'ordinary' or representative figure into large-scale national melodramas staged in spectacular and technologically innovative ways.

While these developments appear integral to the formation of a new, less insular nationalist hegemony, criticism has reacted by investing in some of the incoherence of the 'old' film melodrama, its gallery of types relayed through comic scenes and performance sequences. This mode still persists, and has its own global reference points in genres such as the Kung Fu film or the Italian Western. Particular attention has been paid to how this 'old' form has adapted the attractions of new commodity cultures in advertising and fashion to contest old national hegemonies over cultural practice and social identity.

If there is any unity to these reflections, it derives from the plotting of a disaggregation and a reaggregation of the original object, 'national cinema': disaggregation via a process of linguistic-cultural segmentation via cable and television, and reaggregation and expansion through processes of translation (dubbing/remakes) in Indian films and television channels, and their successful pursuit of markets abroad. But rather than looking only to these currents in the refiguring of identity, I would conclude by stressing the need to consider the complexity of identity boundaries implicit in the availability of a multitude of cultural products. By this I mean not only to the relationship between cultures, but to the different times of a culture, to older and newer forms of subjectivity. In these multiple orientations, in a model of spectatorship founded on multicultural dispositions rather than on culturally singular attachments, Film and Cultural Studies may frame its projects not only within the nation, but beyond it as well.

reviews

review article:

Tania Modleski, *Old Wives' Tales: Feminist Re-Visions of Film and Other Fictions*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, 238 pp.

Anneke Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*. London: MacMillan, 1998, 219 pp.

Patricia White, *Uninvited: Classical Hollywood Cinema and Lesbian Representability*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999, 304 pp.

JULIANNE PIDDUCK

These three books appear at a crossroads in feminist film theory. Over the past decade the discipline's immensely influential psychoanalytic theoretical paradigm has been challenged by a proliferation of other theories and methodologies. Historical scholarship, ethnography and audience studies have been used to confront the often ahistorical assertions of textual analysis grounded in Lacanian psychoanalysis and semiotics. Across the discipline there has been increasing attention to the intersection of gender with other differences, such as sexuality, race, ethnicity and national location. Through this contentious process, the place and pertinence of psychoanalysis (and perhaps metatheories of cinema in general) are called into question. Intriguingly, each of the volumes under review here revises and extends psychoanalytic feminist film theory through encounters with recent interventionist feminist cultural texts and contemporary experiences of spectatorship.

In keeping with this transitional moment in feminist cultural criticism, Tania Modleski prefaces her collection with a polemical introduction. In the face of what she calls 'a newer generation's' perception of earlier feminism as bland, monolithic, and wholly

repressive' (pp. 3–4), Modleski reasserts a tradition of heated debate and attention to difference in 1970s and 1980s feminist scholarship. Building on the insights of this trajectory which she feels has been denigrated by 'postmodern feminism', Modleski examines an eclectic series of topics including political debate (the US Hill/Thomas sexual harassment hearings), romance fiction, recent films and autobiography. The book coheres around feminist interventions in storytelling and genre. The title, *Old Wives' Tales*, evokes both the often denigrated nature of women's stories (personal, cultural and critical) and the ways in which feminism has intervened to shift dominant narratives and fantasies. One aspect of the collection that I found particularly satisfying was a continual interrogation of the relationship between public and private fantasy. Modleski uses psychoanalytic and genre theory innovatively in her treatment of Clarence Thomas and the 'melodrama of suffering black manhood' and in the discussion of feminist appropriations of quintessential (American) male genres, war films (*Dogfight*, [1991]) and Westerns (*The Ballad of Little Jo* [Maggie Greenwald, 1993]). These two chapters explore shifting and contested fantasies about American masculinity, history, race and sexuality. Race, an increasingly central aspect of feminist criticism, forms a core theme of the book. Treatments of African-American playwright/performer Anna Deavere Smith and queer performance artist Sandra Bernhard (specifically, her provocative film *Without You I'm Nothing* [John Boscovich, 1990]) consider contemporary performance strategies with reference to the American tradition of minstrelsy (blackface) and contemporary queer theory. Modleski, always an accomplished and engaging writer, productively incorporates queer and postcolonial theories, maintaining a careful sense of the interplay of gender, sexuality, race, and location.

In keeping with her interest in the traffic between private and social fantasies, Modleski's use of a personal and self-reflexive voice proves by turns deeply moving, persuasive and polemical. For instance, the poignant and relentlessly honest meditation on the lives and deaths of the author's parents moves across different registers of personal memoir, letters, psychoanalysis and narrative theory. Raising questions of class and age sometimes relegated to the margins in feminist cultural theory, this essay shares the power of groundbreaking autobiographical scholarship such as Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, Annette Kuhn's *Family Secrets*, or Elly Bulkin's, Minnie Bruce Pratt's and Barbara Smith's *Yours in Struggle*.¹ On another level, Modleski's incisive commentary on the changing terrain of feminist cultural criticism (genre theory, especially romance novels, and feminist film theory) is thought-provoking from an author who has helped shape these discourses. Yet, in setting up from the start a hostile debate between what she calls 'politically-engaged feminist criticism' and a younger generation

1 See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, CA: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987); Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995); Elly Bulkin, Minnie Bruce Pratt and Barbara Smith, *Yours in Struggle* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1984).

2 Meaghan Morris, 'Banality in cultural studies', in Patricia Mellencamp (ed.), *The Logics of Television* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 14–43.

3 Patricia Mellencamp, *A Fine Romance ... Five Ages of Film Feminism* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995).

of 'postmodern' feminists, Modleski's tone can drift towards excessive defensiveness. In the two chapters on romance fiction in particular, the author reprints vitriolic exchanges with younger authors who uphold the 'banality of cultural studies'² in heralding the genre as unproblematically liberating for women.

Modleski notes that the recent feminist projects considered in *Old Wives' Tales* commonly 'challenge feminist orthodoxies', while having themselves been enabled by feminist politics. Ostensibly, in parallel, earlier theory and criticism have laid the groundwork for an upstart 'postmodern feminism' that sometimes bites the hand that feeds it. As a structuring premiss for a book, I find Modleski's insistence on two hostile generational camps problematic and reductive. While reasserting the breadth and complexity of 1970s and 1980s feminism, she demonizes and makes monolithic some of the 'younger generation' as variously 'postmodern', 'queer' (as opposed to 'lesbian feminist'), and implicitly apolitical. In setting up the debate in this way, Modleski does a disservice to feminist thinkers of all ages who, like herself, productively and intelligently incorporate many modes of thought. In keeping with Modleski's interest in 'old wives' tales', what is at stake here is the very narrative of feminist cultural theory: Who is the author? What came before? What happens next? As an important American voice in the field, Modleski is well placed to give her account, as is Patricia Mellencamp who does so in *The Five Ages of Film Feminism*.³ And thinking about modes of storytelling, Modleski seems to posit a continuous feminist 'metanarrative' line in the face of a postmodern narrative fragmentation into a polyphony of disparate voices and versions. Perhaps some younger feminists have chosen to 'slay the mother' in print, but Smelik and White (and many others) are not among them.

Like *Old Wives' Tales*, Anneke Smelik's *And the Mirror Cracked* takes feminist texts as its objects of study. In response to the 'psychoanalytic readings of ... classical Hollywood cinema ... and experimental women's cinema', which she sees as the twin pillars of feminist film theory, this author takes up the innovations of feminist narrative cinema as a challenge to established feminist film theory. Smelik's attention to recent, primarily European, feminist cinema seeks to update and broaden both canon and theory alike, and her intensive readings of European works by Helke Sander, Marion Hänsel, Marleen Gorris, and Monika Treut are especially welcome in a discipline still dominated by Anglo-US texts and theorists. Sharing Modleski's allegiance to the enabling ground of earlier feminism, Smelik is interested in how 'the historical context of feminism allows both the position of the filmmaker and that of female spectator to become enacted and empowered as conscious and self-reflexive subject positions' (p. 1). Smelik covers a broad range of topics and theoretical frameworks, including feminist authorship in Helke Sander's *The Subjective Factor* (1980), visual excess and the abject

in Percy Adlon's *Bagdad Café* (1988) and Jane Campion's *Sweetie* (1989), and lesbian desire and subjectivity in Monika Treut's *The Virgin Machine* (1988). Cognitive psychology, rhetoric, authorship, cinematic and literary point of view, and feminist and queer theory are placed in dialogue with psychoanalysis and applied to these films which often challenge generic and narrative norms.

Two core chapters on violence against women encapsulate the benefits of Smelik's hybrid scholarship. For Smelik, Hänsel's *Dust* (1983) rests 'on a paradox: through narrative means and cinematic devices the implied director constructs the very subjectivity that the story itself denies [the protagonist]' (p. 59). The author incorporates literary and film criticism to pinpoint conflicting levels of narrative address and point of view, suggesting a schism within the film between affect and cognition. Where the narrative seems to compel a profoundly passive 'buried' subjectivity, elements of cinematic style and feminist rhetorical address offer an empathetic spectatorial reading. In the subsequent chapter, Smelik suggests that Gorris's early works owe their profoundly disturbing qualities to a formal tension between realist and 'metaphorical' codes. Whereas *A Question of Silence* (1982) follows a realist, at times almost 'documentary', aesthetic, Smelik points to its powerful figural qualities – the feminist metaphor of the home as a 'prison of gender', or 'murder as a metaphor for the smothered anger and resistance of women'. Finally, Smelik offers a fascinating recursive analysis of *Broken Mirrors* (1984) as an engagement with Mulvey's sadistic controlling male gaze. While the nameless male murderer's gaze proves literally violent, the community of prostitutes offers a 'realist' counterpoint to this invasive violence – 'the experience of women who are subjects in a culture that refuses them the status of subject' (p. 117).

Smelik notes that subjectivity forms an underlying preoccupation in *And the Mirror Cracked*. With her rhetorical emphasis, she posits an emergent historical communicative situation where feminist filmmakers change the codes of dominant cinema to address (or even help construct) a 'female feminist subject' of the cinema. In this respect her project shares ground with *Old Wives' Tales*. Yet what is missing here at times is specificity: What exactly is a 'feminist' film? Who qualifies as a feminist auteur? Who (and where) is the 'feminist audience' or spectator, and what ground does she share with her female (and presumably non-feminist) friends? Where do these works circulate? Who are their intended audiences? Smelik's rhetorical stance stresses a welcome historical and social dimension to accounts of filmmaking and spectatorship, yet her readings are over-reliant on textual analysis at the expense of contextual considerations. Suggestive close readings get bogged down in methodological detail, seeming limited when they do not extend to other feminist works and debates. For instance, the chapters on violence focus almost

exclusively on feminist independent cinema without discussing how Gorris's and Hänsel's strategies relate to other popular independent, or even avant-garde, filmmaking. A highly textual emphasis, in conjunction with the very different international films considered, results in a lack of continuity. Thus the emergent 'female feminist subject' stands, like the abstract subject of pure psychoanalysis, outside of a viewing context. Unlike the taken-for-granted American or British contexts of much Anglo-US criticism, perhaps part of the difficulty in writing about feminist independent cinema lies in defining a shared 'experience' of spectatorship.

While Modleski and Smelik address recent feminist projects, in *Uninvited* Patricia White mines classic narrative cinema and psychoanalytic feminist film theory to develop a model of lesbian spectatorship. At issue here are the complex historical 'conditions of lesbian representability' which White reads across a series of case studies, from the prohibitive and productive influence of the Hays Code to contemporary lesbian art video, from the lesbian as a 'haunting' figure in the woman's picture and feminist film theory to the ambiguous typing of supporting actresses. In common with Modleski, White's readings of sexuality and gender are intricately interwoven with the question of race. And like Smelik, White foregrounds the affective engagement between spectators and texts, exploring the relation between fantasy (using LaPlanche and Pontalis and Freud rather than Lacan) and the social grounding of 'experience'. (In fact, the theoretical spectre haunting all three volumes is undoubtedly Teresa de Lauretis's pioneering scholarship on experience, fantasy, lesbian desire and representability).⁴

Uninvited invites lively response. I will confine myself to two major themes taken on by this groundbreaking and important project. The first concerns hauntings, secrets, gossip – notions arising from the scholarship of Eve Sedgwick and Terry Castle.⁵ White uses these themes to read intertext (the star coding of Bette Davis, the production history of *Queen Christina* [Rouben Mamoulian, 1933]), character types (supporting actresses and stars) and genre (horror films which exude, without naming, the lesbian spectre). To her credit, White does not seek a lesbian in every closet; rather, she reads the filmic intertexts of reviews, production lore, and star biographies as facilitating lesbian readings and fantasies without getting bogged down in the fascinating but irresolvable questions of 'was she or wasn't she?'. The peculiarly present yet unspoken status of homosexuality, and lesbianism in particular, has prompted creative poststructuralist reading strategies which complicate more conventional debates around 'positive images' and 'visibility'. Building from this body of work, White explores how 'classical Hollywood cinema, regulated by a self-censoring agency and a rare set of favorable economic conditions, works along the faultlines of Sedgwick's binarisms – secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance,

4 See, for instance, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984); 'Film and the visible', in *Bad Object-Choices* (eds), *How Do I Look?* (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1991); and *The Practice of Love* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

5 See Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990).

private/public'. Queer theory is used here as a canny foil (rather than as a bludgeon) to the binaries which have dogged psychoanalytic feminist film theory. White challenges a reigning 'image of femininity defined by lack and negativity', using lesbianism as 'the ghost in the machine, a signifier of the body, desire, the other woman'.

At the heart of *Uninvited* are two chapters which reinsert lesbian desire into the affectively charged space of the woman's picture and feminist film theory's account of female spectatorship. White breaks a taboo which has largely structured feminist film theory's account of melodrama and of feminist spectatorship, noting 'the woman's picture's ambiguous invitation to lesbian fantasy ... the convergence of the perverse and the sentimental that melodrama allows'. Given the centrality of the woman's picture to the genesis of feminist film criticism, White uses it as a case study to 'test the limits and investments of straight feminist film theory'. With melodrama's ideological closures of family and romance far from seamless, she provocatively teases out the ambiguously intense bonds rendered 'safe', nurturing, and platonic by feminist film theory – relationships between mothers and daughters (*Stella Dallas* [King Vidor, 1937]) and best friends, maids and governesses (*Imitation of Life* [Douglas Sirk, 1958], *Now, Voyager* [Irving Rapper, 1942]).

The second major issue emerging from *Uninvited* concerns history, reading strategies and the subject of feminist film theory. Noting the formative place of classic Hollywood cinema in the western imaginary, past and present, White, like Modleski, explores the relation between public and private knowledges and fantasies. The book's subtle and entertaining readings cohere around what the author dubs lesbian 'retrospectatorship' – an interplay between cultural codes and fantasy. In the case of classic narrative cinema, these encounters between subjects and texts are further complicated by time-lag. For White, the contemporary lesbian imaginary moulds itself with, around and against the wonderful ghosts, flamboyant stars (Bette Davis), character actors (Ethel Waters, Mercedes McCambridge, Agnes Moorehead), and the 'intertextual' discourses of gossip, genre and innuendo studied in *Uninvited*.

But perhaps the ghost in this machine, the threshold of White's project, concerns the historical lesbian spectator. Ultimately, White reads the historical 'conditions of lesbian representability' towards the vanishing point (or towards asserting the existence, agency and desires) of the contemporary lesbian spectator. While opening avenues into historical 'alternative' readings of classic Hollywood cinema – like Clare Whatling's 'nostalgia for the abject'⁶ – White's retrospectatorship reads ultimately towards a contemporary lesbian spectator whose imaginary has been shaped by the iconic status of historical Hollywood genres, iconic texts and moments, and stars. This contemporary emphasis is underlined by her attention to recent

6 Clare Whatling, *Screen Dreams: Fantasising Lesbians in Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

art video such as Jean Carlomusto's *L is For the Way you Look* (1991) or Todd Haynes's *Dottie Gets Spanked* (1993). While White draws from a few existing interviews with older lesbians, her project is limited by gaps in historical research caused by the invisibility and disenfranchisement of these subjects – and by the presentist bias of much poststructuralist theory. What falls between the cracks here for lesbian and gay film scholarship in general is the thorny question of how this cinema made sense to historical spectators.

Who is the subject of feminist film theory? What is the relationship between our readings as specialist feminist film theorists and those of imputed disparate female audiences and spectators? It strikes me that this question runs through these three works, and perhaps through the field in general. The bias of increasingly personal textual readings is that the subject of feminist film theory sees, hears and speaks very much like its author. The problematic dislocation of an ahistorical psychoanalytic subject and the political 'difficulties of difference' have prompted diverse writing strategies. Modleski, like many, uses autobiography to work through the personal while referring out to a broader context of social fantasies and desires. Smelik mines her personal history to posit a distinctive 'female feminist subject' for feminist narrative cinema. Finally, White's closing chapter underlines the personal nature of her project in an account of how *All About Eve* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1950) and Bette Davis 'can function as a seduction fantasy and revision of cultural authority for a contemporary lesbian spectator' – the film's fantasmatic resonance for the author. Psychoanalysis, in common with many feminist epistemologies, begins (but hopefully does not end) with the self. These three works, part of feminist film theory's ongoing 'affair' with psychoanalysis, revise the complex lines of fantasy and desire between the personal and the social.

review:

David Buckingham (ed.), *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy*. London: UCL Press, 1998, 207 pp.

Chris Richards, *Teen Spirits, Music and Identity in Media Education*. London: UCL Press, 1998, 215 pp.

Julian Sefton-Green (ed.), *Digital Diversions, Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia*. London: UCL Press, 1998, 178 pp.

Sue Howard (ed.), *Wired-Up: Young People and the Electronic Media*. London: UCL Press, 1998, 180 pp.

PETER MCLUSKIE

The subject of young people and the media has generated a great deal of public and academic debate, much of which has been devoted to defending one of two camps. On one side have been the cultural pessimists who have understood the media to have a corrupting influence on the moral and educational development of young people who, because they are young and inexperienced, are most at risk from its seductive powers. Opposed to this view there has been a gathering trend towards recognizing young people's media literacy. For some academics, this more optimistic account of young people's media use sails too close to commercial discourses and is judged to be an overvaluation of what are actually unremarkable consumer competences. Nevertheless, the idea that young people are sophisticated media users rather than simply dupes is becoming a generally accepted principle within academic discourse. It is a position given additional weight by the rise of new media technologies such as CD-Rom, the Internet, DVD and new conceptual models

such as interactivity and nonlinearity, which have confounded many of us who were shaped by older media forms and technologies such as cinema, broadcast and narrative. In terms of new media, we tend to accept that young people are the experts. Many of us will be familiar with stories about teachers, suddenly charged with delivering IT sessions, turning to the students for help and guidance. These stories may be apocryphal but they point up an important point: there are clear gaps between student–teacher knowledges and competences that can turn the learning process on its head.

However, there is a particular dilemma here for media educationalists: if young people are so clever with the media then what do we teach them? Are we competent to teach them? And, indeed, are educational institutions the best places for young people to learn? These are some of the questions that inform this collection of volumes published under the series title 'Media, Education and Culture'. *Teaching Popular Culture: Beyond Radical Pedagogy* feels as if it should be the first volume in the series and has the breadth and tone of an overview. It provides a thoughtful and, perhaps for some, provocative account of the state of play in media education, and attempts to clear a path for those educationalists who are no longer convinced of the credibility and viability of radical teaching paradigms. The 'radical pedagogy' of the title refers to a broad yet historically specific set of teaching practices and philosophies that had as their central aim the emancipation of the student. This was in opposition to traditional classroom practices and philosophies which aimed to mould students into productive and well-behaved citizens at one with the dominant ideology. The period and its political ambitions are summed up in the editorial when David Buckingham refers to a post 1968 atmosphere of political activism where teachers, informed by books with fiercely radical titles such as *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, *Deschooling Society* and *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, set out to 'conscientize' their students, to arm them with the skills of 'crap detecting' and to 'liberate them from the shackles of ideology'. But today this project is no longer tenable. As Buckingham concludes, now 'everything seems much more confused and contradictory. While there are some for whom the libertarian rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s still has a place, the mission of radical pedagogy now seems much harder to sustain' (p. 1).

Buckingham goes on to map the various takes on the project of critical pedagogy and highlight its many limitations, including the very real problem of where to draw the line when allowing students a free voice. For example, should students be able to voice opinions that may be contrary to the ideologies of the radical teacher? Does freedom in the classroom really mean conformity to an often unacknowledged socialist political agenda, or are students free to voice racist or sexist opinions?

For Buckingham, however, the central problem of critical

pedagogy is its inability to translate its theoretical tenets into some sort of practice. Herein lies the answer to the question, where do we go from here? Buckingham, and to some extent the book's contributors, are advocating a kind of back-to-basics empiricism which attempts to ground theory in the realities of classroom practice. The extent to which the volume does offer alternatives to the theoretically overburdened critically pedagogy is questionable. Indeed, the conclusion to the chapter which follows Buckingham's appeal has Carmen Luke suggesting that the way forward in pedagogical terms might involve a 'renewed emphasis on theory' (p. 36), while in the final chapter of the volume Bill Green reflects on what he identifies as a woefully undertheorized subject: learning. Nevertheless, what this volume does achieve is to give voice to the everyday problems and frustrations, many of which circulate in anecdotal form rather than as academic discourse, that face teachers attempting to impart knowledge and identify processes of learning and understanding. For example, Donna J. Grace's and Joseph Tobin's chapter highlights the kind of unruly behaviour that results when children are given freedom to express themselves with practical work such as video production. They show how children's use of video allows them to construct a non-school space where they are able to adopt identities and languages that are non-regulation. For many teachers this unruliness can be uncomfortable. The authors claim, however, that these activities are useful inasmuch as they temporarily destabilize the teacher's authority, providing children with status and power and thus validating cultures and pleasures which are not usually recognized within the school (p. 59).

Indeed, the tone and content of the anthology is generally student-centred and vigorously encourages an inclusive approach which recognizes popular and unofficial culture and which minimizes the role and authority of the teacher in the classroom. The same can be said of Chris Richards's book, *Teen Spirits: Music and Identity in Media Education*, which calls for greater recognition of pop music within the school curriculum. Richards outlines the many reasons why this neglect has occurred, including the very difficult process of convincing young people that when it comes to pop, teacher knows best. As Richards points out, pop music belongs not to school knowledge but youth cultural knowledge: the two can never meet. However, to say that the book simply advocates more pop music in the curriculum does not quite do justice to this work which is, in fact, a highly complex, partly biographical account of the awkward and finely tuned social interactions and positionings that are precipitated by discussions of pop music. The problem is that pop music is understood to reveal interiority, which means that discussion cannot take place without some sense of how one's knowledge and tastes are being received and judged by others – a risky business if you are not conversant with what is hip and what is not. As

Richards points out, 'knowledge about music cannot be separated from the particular social relations of the groups gathered to discuss it' (p. 114). This means any discussion of pop music will have to deal with the problem of music knowledge being invoked 'tactically', of students refusing to reveal knowledge as part of their 'negotiation' of immediate social relationships and hierarchies (p. 67). Ultimately, while Richards's findings are fascinating in themselves and add something of great value to our understanding of how music knowledge and notions of hipness are used to establish identity and relations of power within the classroom and between adult-youth groups, his appeal for more pop music in the curriculum is nevertheless probably diminished by these findings and indeed establishes a rather grim picture of evasive or embarrassed students unwilling to give up their valuable knowledge or simply uncertain what to claim to like in the presence of those who might be hipper. It feels as though asking young people what kind of music they like is unnecessarily cruel and perhaps replaces one kind of taste hierarchy (the school) with another (hipness). One of Richards's most interesting, and perhaps telling, findings is the differential between working-class and middle-class students: while working-class youth find difficulty allying subcultural knowledge with school knowledge, middle-class youth have little difficulty establishing continuity, and recognize quickly how subcultural knowledge can be invested as educational capital. It would seem that for working-class students, who are investing heavily in non-school identities, unofficial culture or subculture is as far as they can get, not only from official culture, but also from an institution that constructs them as young and subordinate. The problem, then, is not simply one of different kinds of knowledge but of how that knowledge is being used to negotiate present and future relationships with educational institutions, and how that knowledge can be submitted or withheld according to the kinds of investments (subcultural or educational) that young people are able and willing to make.

These problems bear some relation to another issue raised by Richards and addressed by a number of contributors in the other volumes. It concerns the tendency for teachers and educationalists to privilege the written word over practical work. Many of us will be familiar with the rather awkward experience of setting practical-based assignments, such as video production projects, only to ask students to write an evaluation that typically forms the basis of their assessment. Placing the written word before the image like this would seem to collude with a conventional value system that Media Studies people in other circumstances might strongly object to. If we really wanted to pitch to young people's strengths – often a visual literacy rather than verbal one – we might add more weight to practical work rather than subjecting them to the more alien rigours of essay writing. This of course is fraught with difficulties as well.

Apart from the problem of assessing such work (a subject that is in little evidence in all volumes), there is a danger of co-opting practical work which has been constructed as a space where students can indulge in authentic play and experimentation away from the constraints and the artificial identities imposed by the classroom.

Digital Diversion: Youth Culture in the Age of Multimedia is the only volume that demonstrates sensitivity to the discursive tie-ins between youth and the media. It begins with warnings about how notions of youth and technology are often yoked together in public debate and how one is often used to talk about the other. The result can be a rather confused picture of young people's media use. This volume, based on close observation of young people and participation in their culture, sets out to establish a clear understanding of young people's digital media use and their engagements with new technologies. Much of the observation and participation is informal and spontaneous: for example Karen Orr Vered observes children playing computer games during their break, while Joseph Tobin studies his own child in the intimate and informal surroundings of the home. The very unstructuredness of these studies, their feeling of being written by off-duty academics, often gives the research findings a feeling of immediacy.

Many of the findings celebrate young people's creativity and the potential for digital technologies to establish more equal social relations. For example, Chris Abbott sees the World Wide Web extending the range of young people's voices, while Helen Cunningham suggests the ways in which digital technologies are being used in the creation of club cultures – the major creative element here being the way young people use old and unsophisticated software and hardware to achieve state-of-the-art effects.

However, the volume is not wholly celebratory and indeed is cautious of the claim, often implied by advertising campaigns, that digital technologies can aid creative skills and provide otherwise untalented people with flair and imagination. As Julian Sefton-Green and David Buckingham point out in chapter 4, much of what passes as computer creativity amounts to little more than superficial embellishments selected by the user from a limited menu of clip-art and other such effects. The volume also raises questions about the educational role of computers and digital media. As the editorial points out, computers are often assumed to be inherently educational and indeed we find that parents, while hostile to old-new media and technologies such as video, are positively embracing computers as an investment in their child's future. That new technologies such as the computer can elicit such an enthusiastic reception from parents and moral guardians is remarkable and, as Helen Nixon suggests in chapter 2, may be down to astute marketing campaigns rather than any inherent educational properties.

Young people actually often learn and acquire computer literacy outside the official structures and supervised spaces of school and home: more often than not learning takes place with online communities and informal learning situations with acquaintances and unofficial mentors who may not be marked as teachers. Indeed, Joseph Tobin concludes his study of his sons 'virtual life' by claiming that most teachers are neither well suited nor well situated to teach digital media. This is a stark conclusion and might easily lead some of us to throw our hands in the air. Before we do so, however, it should be added that what Tobin is advocating is a more student-centred – and admittedly idealistic – mode of learning, where students 'pose the problem' and teachers 'facilitate', and where teachers 'learn alongside their students' (p. 127).

Finally, *Wired-Up: Young People and the Electronic Media*, is a curiously unsatisfying collection of works presenting media research from New Zealand and Australia. To begin with, the 'wired-up' of the title should perhaps suggest a concern with new media – computers, the Internet, and so on – but in fact much of what is discussed involves old–new media such as television and video games. The findings, too, often seem unremarkable: for example, Sue Howard, desperate to demonstrate that children are not mere dupes in front of the television, argues that the medium can 'actually stimulate intellectual activity rather than prevent it' (p. 74): but few academics within Media Studies would dispute this finding today. Similarly, Nola Alloway's and Pam Gilbert's chapter on video games discovers that Gameboy is aimed at boys, that the games are violent and that the narrative is so organized as to conflate masculinity with violence and femininity with pleasure: again, this hardly seems surprising.

However, one of the central aims of the anthology is to introduce a lay audience to academic debate, and it is perhaps for this reason that it often feels ponderous. Having said this, there are a number of interesting, and what may prove valuable, contributions providing new research on subjects that have tended to be overlooked. For example, Geoff Lealand's chapter presents research on a neglected television audience, preschool children; while chapter 8 looks at the ways in which young people use the telephone to establish and cultivate intimate friendships with peers within the context of the home and family.

This series of volumes will no doubt stimulate debate about the educational role of Media Studies and the practical and intellectual problems posed by its delivery in the classroom. They are not practical guides for teachers. Nevertheless, the series should provide teachers and educationalists with the moral support to continue to deliver and defend an often embattled subject, and one that continues to be poorly represented in school curricula.